

S E R M O N S,

BY

K

JAMES MUIR, A.M.

M I N I S T E R



OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

B E R M U D A.

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
BY JAMES TOD.

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M.DCC.LXXXVII.

S. E. R. M. O. N. S.

BY

JAMES MUIR

M. I. S. T. R.



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BERMUDA

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR

BY JAMES T. D.

M. D. C. C. L. X. X. I.

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To the Right Honorable the

Countess of Leven and Melvil:

THE FOLLOWING

S H E E T S,

AS A

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

OF THE

AUTHOR'S RESPECT

AND

GRATITUDE,

ARE

HUMBLY DEDICATED.

BERMUDA, August, 1787.

TO THE READER.

THE following Sermons, sent to the press at the request of the Author's pastoral charge at Bermuda, were submitted to my perusal, with a desire, that in his absence, I might superintend the publication. They are written by a person firmly attached to the doctrine of salvation by divine grace, and seem to me to breathe the same spirit of sincere piety and fervent love to the souls of men, which so eminently characterized the Author's worthy father. The person I mean was the late reverend doctor George Muir, of Paisley, with whom I lived many years as a co-pastor, in the strictest bonds of friendship, and whose name I know to be yet sacrosanct to the friends of true and undefiled religion, wherever he was known. The Sermons are written with an unaffected plainness and chaste simplicity of style, which will probably recommend them to persons of sincere piety, who love to hear the Gospel preached, not with the wisdom of words, but with the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

As to the execution of the work, I have only to say, that the publisher has adhered strictly to the Author's manuscript. There are some passages which have marks of quotation, and yet are not in every word and syllable, exactly copied from our translation of the Bible. It was once intended to have altered these, and given universally, marks of reference to the text,—but on considering that they are either intended by paraphrase to be improved, or by easy and plain allusion, to be applied to the illustration of the subject treated of, it was thought best, lest the Author's view should be disappointed, to leave them as they now are. The discourses are therefore humbly recommended to the perusal, particularly of young persons, and to heads of families, for the instruction of their children and servants.

JOHN WITHERSPOON.

Princeton, October 25, 1787.



S E R-

SERMONS,

BY

JAMES MUIR, A. M. &c.

SERMON I.

A Profession of Christianity universally binding.

I CORINTHIANS 15, 29.

"Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptised for the dead?"

THE Apostle, in this chapter, establishes the doctrine of the resurrection of the body; his great argument is founded on a striking fact: Our Lord Jesus, having expired on the cross, and lain for some time in the grave, rose again from the dead; in which, as a first fruit, the possibility of the thing was fully manifested, and a strong expectation raised of a succeeding harvest. A new argument, in support of this doctrine, is introduced in my text, taken from the impression, which this expectation made on the minds of men; raising them above the fears of death, and enabling them to "resist unto blood, striving against sin."

As the words of my text are involved in some obscurity, I shall endeavour, through divine

vine aid, to clear them from difficulties, and state their full meaning; and then I shall take notice of the instruction which they give.

It would be tedious to repeat, and much more so, deliberately to discuss, all the interpretations, which have been given of this passage, particularly of the ambiguous phrase, "baptised for the dead." Some schemes of interpretation suppose facts for their support, which are neither confirmed by ancient writers, nor likely in themselves; others depend on criticisms which are uncommon and arbitrary. Of the first, is that which supposes some persons to have received baptism in the name of their dead friends, who, before their departure, had approved of the Christian system, but not soon enough to receive, in person, this sacred ordinance. Besides the extravagance of the supposed fact, on which this hypothesis rests, it has no manner of foundation in scripture, and very little, in the early records of the church. Of the other schemes, which uncommon and arbitrary criticism supports, the principal proposes an alteration in the phrase, "for the dead;" which phrase, according to such interpreters, ought in the original to be in the singular number, and not, as we read it at present, in the plural; and they refer it to the being baptised into the religion of Jesus, who, on the hypothesis our Apostle combats, was still dead.

It has none of the inconveniences of the former schemes, and needs neither the support of uncertain facts, nor strained criticism, when the words
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are rendered thus: "What shall they do who are baptised *in the room of the dead?*" as if he had said, Christians are certainly animated with future hopes, "else" why are they "baptised" in token of their embracing the religion of Jesus, "in the room of the dead," who are just fallen in the cause of Christ, but are yet supported by a succession of new converts, who immediately offer themselves to fill up their places; as ranks of soldiers, who advance to the combat in the room of their companions, who have just been slain in their fight. "If the dead rise not at all, why are they then baptised in the room of the dead?" as cheerfully ready at the peril of their lives, to maintain this glorious cause in the world.

The interpretation I have now given is natural and easily introduces the remainder of the discourse; being a satisfactory account of the "jeopardy," in which the Corinthians as a society, and the Apostle Paul, as an individual, voluntarily stood, whilst they faithfully served their great and common master.

Those who fell in the cause of the gospel, now come in view, as immediately succeeded by others; and their numbers are even seen to multiply by their fall.

The disciples residing at Jerusalem, when our Saviour ascended up into Heaven, amounted only to an hundred and twenty. Immediately after this, three thousand, in one day, were received into the church; and it is not long before the sacred historian speaks of them as "a multitude." In the mean

mean time, the Jewish priests, and the rulers of the nation, did every thing in their power to prevent the further progress of Christianity. The Apostles are imprisoned, and punished with stripes: James, the son of Zebedee, is killed with the sword of Herod: Stephen becomes a victim to the fury of the people: Men and women, of all ages and distinctions, are hauled from their own houses, by their cruel persecutors, to imprisonment, to torture, and to death, because they would not blaspheme the name of Jesus, nor disengage themselves from his cause.

If we look beyond Jerusalem, we find that Christians are "every where spoken against;" that they are liable to suffering, and exposed to death. The storm wasted its highest rage upon the ministers of Christ. Our Apostle's own afflictions may be remembered as an example of the whole: "In labours," says he, "more abundant, in stripes above measure in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, save one: Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck: A night and a day I have been in the deep: In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Yes, my brethren, they "had trial
of

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“ of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover,
 “ of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned,
 “ they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were
 “ slain with the sword: They wandered about in
 “ sheep-skins, and goat skins; being destitute,
 “ afflicted, tormented: Of whom the world was
 “ not worthy: They wandered in deserts, and
 “ in mountains, and in dens, and caves of the
 “ earth.”

Nor was this storm of short continuance; it
 raged more or less for above two hundred years;
 and no sooner did one fall in the glorious cause,
 but another was ready to maintain the same ground
 and dispute the victory to the last. Luke and Ti-
 tus served under the Apostle Paul; steadily resolv-
 ed, and fully prepared to prosecute the same
 cause, should he, in adherence to it, fall a sacrifice:
 The evangelist Mark was trained up to the service
 under the Apostle Peter: The nephew of Barnabas
 learned intrepidity from his uncle, and acquired,
 through experience, a confirmed boldness in the
 honorable undertaking. In one word, Christianity,
 like the palm-tree, flourished under oppression:
 The blood of the saints, generated seed for the
 church; so that after a severe contest against every
 device, which the malice of men and devils could
 invent, idolatry was generally destroyed, and the
 name of Jesus became great, from the rising to the
 sitting of the sun.

What, my brethren, could induce the expe-
 rienced, and the learned; the wealthy, and the
 powerful; women, and children, to give up with

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whatever is dear to human nature, rather than to dissemble, or to forsake the profession of Christianity? Why did the physician Luke, and Zenas the lawyer, support a despised interest, at the risk of losing every secular advantage, which might arise from their respective professions? What meant the disciple of Gamaliel, and the native of Alexandria, to embark in a slighted, persecuted cause, in contempt of the name, which their learning and their eloquence might have procured them among men? Had the levite of Cyprus, and the disciple of Joppa, the attachment common to men, when they were so lavish of their possessions, and property, that Josus must sell his lands to feed the hungry, and Dorcas labour hard to clothe the naked? Did Dyonisius forget the honours of an Athenian Senator, and Cornelius his rank in Caesar's army, whilst they expose themselves to disgrace, and ignominy, by ranging under the banner of the cross? What could animate the delicate sex of Damaris, or the tender years of Timothy, that reproach and suffering could not deter them, from an open profession of their belief of the gospel? It could be nothing, brethren, but the hopes of immortality; which were so pleasant, and so strong, that the world, in its most inviting appearances, was despised, and forsaken by them, in search after a better world, "and the resurrection from the dead," where they "neither marry nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."

General

SERMON I.

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General consent is always a weighty argument; but nothing is more generally expected among Christians than a resurrection from the dead; the resurrection of their Saviour, and the assurances he has given them, of sharing with them this privilege, has often raised them above all the infirmities of flesh and blood, and every attachment to what is most valuable on earth, as heirs of better things, and of more animating prospects. It is no wonder, our Apostle even protests by this circumstance, that these hopes must be certain and well-grounded, otherwise, numbers of such various tempers and ages, of all capacities and degrees of improvement, of wealth and influence, had never ventured the open profession of that religion, to which multitudes were daily falling sacrifices before their eyes.

Having now endeavoured to clear the text of the difficulties which attend it, and to state its full meaning, let us enquire what instruction it affords. It teaches us,

That a profession of religion is necessary, whatever may be the consequence. Baptism was the proper expression of this, in the age to which my text refers; for Christianity, being then in its infancy, received into its bosom Jew and Gentile by this sacred rite; who thereby renounced their former state, to enter upon one, for which the Jewish dispensation had long been preparing them, and which, the darkness and superstition of Heathenism loudly required. When Christianity had obtained a firm footing, baptism, being administered to infants,

fants, is not so proper a test of the individual's own profession of it, as it is the act of the parent, in which he professes his own faith; and lays the strongest obligation upon his child to follow his steps. The ordinance of the Lord's supper is the service, in which we now take upon ourselves these obligations, which parents came under in our name; and publicly enlist, as faithful soldiers, under the banner of the cross.

Such a profession is binding upon us, were it to cost us our property, our reputation, and our lives; for none of these things which we naturally estimate at the highest rate, have the least value, when compared with doing the will of God, and becoming the objects of his love. Present possessions of every kind are soon to be snatched from us; a reputation, among men, is an airy, unsubstantial, passing thing; even life itself is short and uncertain; but the effect of doing the will of God, follows the individual into the eternal world, and the Divine favour alone can bless and refresh him, during his future existence.

This is so plain and affecting a truth, that nothing could prevent its efficacy, but a heart fatally wedded to the world, and fertile in inventions; specious indeed in appearance, but dangerous in the trial.

It is a vain shelter, under which some men take refuge, who trust in the Saviour's merit, for their safety at last; from whence alone, the strictest professor derives all his hope, and expect to fare as well as others, without pretending to such strictness,

ness, or making the great ado, which is accounted the blemish of a religious character.

That a Christian's hopes arise entirely from the Saviour's obedience unto death, is universally allowed; but that any can have well-grounded pretensions to these hopes, who do not openly profess, and constantly live in a manner suitable to Christianity, is as universally denied, by all who know the gospel. For the gospel is equally strict in regulating the practice, as the faith of men, in requiring the open profession of religion, as the secret principles of it in the heart; and in making it necessary for salvation to preserve both the form and power of godliness, unto the end. The taking things by halves, and separating what God has joined together, is the snare, in which satan holds the generality of mankind, under this dispensation of grace, to their own ruin. If men really believe the doctrines of the gospel, why should they refuse to practise its precepts? If religion has a seat in the heart, why should the profession of it be withheld? If the power of it be felt, why should the form be wanting?

The fact, brethren, is this; such apologies, for so considerable defects, can only arise in a corrupt, unregenerated heart; men would thereby pacify, and amuse their own consciences, and lull them asleep, that they may yield to sinful shame, and continue their guilty courses, without disturbance or reproof.

The Sovereign Judge of men, and the Saviour of the world, allows you not the indulgencies, and
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liberties, which you foolishly take : but gives fair warning, and positive assurance, both concerning guilty shame, and defective conduct. We learn from the Saviour's own mouth, the consequences of the first : " Whosoever shall be ashamed of me " and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful " generation, of him also shall the Son of man be " ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his " Father, with the Holy Angels " And the scripture puts the danger of a defect, either in faith, or in practice, out of all doubt ; particularly in the earnest exhortation of the Apostle to Christians in general : " Giving all diligence, add to your faith, " virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge ; and to know- " ledge, temperance ; and to temperance, pati- " ence ; and to patience, godliness ; and to god- " liness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kind- " ness, charity."

These are the genuine fruits of knowing Jesus Christ, and receiving his word into the heart : Where they abound, they prepare the individual for the kingdom of Heaven, and make him certain, that an entrance shall be administered unto him abundantly into this kingdom. But where faith has not in its train, " virtue, knowledge, tem- " perance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, " and charity," such a man's hopes are declared to be vain, as he is " blind, not seeing afar off," hav- ing " forgotten that he was purged from his old " sins."

Would you, then, my brethren, be Christians indeed, you must believe, and obey the gospel :
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you must feel its influence on your heart, and profess your attachment to it, at every hazard, in your lives; and you must continue, unshaken believers of its doctrines, and steady practisers of its precepts, unto the end; otherwise, you are not the disciples of Jesus, nor can you receive any benefit, from what he has done.

I dare not limit the Holy One of Israel, nor pretend to say, that none ever obtained mercy, who neglected repentance, and submission to the gospel, until they were on the brink of an eternal world; but this I say, and wish it to be remembered, that such have little encouragement. You are likely to die as you live; and to pay very dear, at that awful moment, for your irreligion, and immorality. Your former forgetfulness of God, and disregard to the cross, your attachment to your lusts, and irresolution in the practice of holiness, shall then rend your souls with intolerable anguish, and introduce you trembling, and in despair, to the unseen state.

For God's sake, brethren, expose not yourselves, to irrecoverable ruin. Immediately, whilst it is in your power, make an open, a sincere, a determined profession of religion. Do it, were it to cost you your good name, and draw down upon you heavy reproach; for this is nothing compared with the future peace of your own minds. You have now an opportunity to make such a profession; once more you shall see the table of the Lord covered in your presence; the pledges of redeeming love are once more to be in your offer:

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If this opportunity be neglected, and these offers slighted, perhaps God may harden your hearts, that you may have no inclination henceforth to improve them; perhaps they may be removed from you, or you from them; whilst nothing remains, but the disgrace and ruin, which your irresolution, and folly, have drawn deservedly upon you.

We may also learn from the doctrine in my text, that if a profession of religion be necessary, at the peril of all that is near and dear to us in life, those who neglect this when it subjects them to no such inconvenience, are altogether inexcusable.

You may engage, my brethren, in the services of our holy religion, and fight under the banner of the cross, without endangering your needoom, or possessions; your safety, or your lives. You may possibly meet with some ill-natured taunts, and be exposed to bitter reproach; this, however, can only be from a few, whose judgment, in these matters, is not to be regarded; your character will, hereby, become more generally respected, and your name be handed down with a sweet savour to succeeding ages.

Why, then, are you so backward to become the soldiers of Jesus, and to fight in his service? What employment can engage you, which is comparable to this? or where are such lasting honors to be reaped? if your way be clear, and the highest encouragements be before you, what can withhold you from what is so necessary and important? Can you pretend unworthiness for such honors, and incapacity to engage in this service? It is al-

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pretence; being a specious cover over your unwillingness to forsake your evil ways, and to take the trouble of conforming to the precepts of the gospel. It is to sinners we are sent, and our commission is to prevail upon such to come in. Here is wisdom to instruct you, who are ignorant; righteousness to justify you, who are guilty; a sanctifying spirit to make you holy, who are defiled; and redemption to set you, who groan under the imperfections and trials of a present state, entirely free. If you, therefore, are now willing to enlist in the Redeemer's train, your past life shall be no hindrance; only come, aggravated as your former guilt may be, and from this moment, devote yourselves to the service of God; then, none in Heaven, and none on Earth, can forbid you the honors, and privileges of the disciples of Jesus:

Perhaps you are too much attached to the world; you estimate its profits and connections at too high a rate; you roll its pleasures as a sweet morsel under your tongue, and swallow down the deadly draught, destroy your health, kill your time, and neglect the necessary, as well as the most serious business of life. You must indeed cease from such conduct before you can be Christians. Your love to the world, and to the things thereof, must be so moderate, as shall be consistent with your loving God, and engaging in his service. You must neither throw away your time at the gaming table, nor among riotous company. You must have no more to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, but must boldly reprove them. This requires re-

solution and perseverance; but it would repay you with present peace of mind, and such future hopes, that you will never regret any pains, or trouble which it may cost.

It is possible; you are afraid of reproach; your companions may deride you as beside yourselves, and be disgusted with your company. All this may happen; but what of it all? you shall associate with others, more worthy of your friendship, and be prepared for the society of all the valuable persons, who have ever existed, in any age, to taste, with them, the purest pleasures, during eternity.

As you are required to give up with desires which are born with you, and confirmed by inveterate habits, it becomes part of the present argument, to shew the reasonableness of such a request on our part. This is easily done, since these desires and habits, can only be considered as the disease of the mind, which cannot remain, without endangering the individual, in the highest degree. The burning thirst, which attends a fever, and the ravings, which it sometimes occasions, are not more certain symptoms of an ill habit of body, than inordinate attachment to the pursuits, and pleasures of the world, is of a soul which has become sensual, and depraved. He would be highly blamed, who should encrease the fatal symptoms in the one case; and why should not he also, who encourages in himself, or in others, what threatens the soul with certain ruin, be so in the other? but religion alone can allay the fatal thirst, and correct the distracted raving. A sincere profession, and hearty

heartly improvement of religion, in general, as far as it has a respect to what corrects and reforms our depraved nature, is without doubt, indispensably binding upon every reasonable creature: Particularly, when Christianity is in question, the obligation is encreased by every tie of gratitude, of interest, and of safety.

If, after all that has been said, you are still irresolute, and are in danger of leaving the house of God as irreligious, and sensual as before, only loaded with aggravated guilt, having anew set at nought the counsel of God, and refused his reproof—I shall try you with one other consideration, and should it also be fruitless, your blood must be upon your own heads.

It is not long before death shall place you among separate spirits; nor shall the interval be thought long, between that and the general judgment. Tell me, ye who are undetermined and wavering, how you shall be able to face the glorious company of martyrs, and confessors? For Christ, they cheerfully parted with possessions, and property; but you cannot, for his sake, deny yourselves the pleasures, the luxuries, or the vanities of life. They thought no suffering, or tribulation, too much in his service; but you neglect this entirely for some unnecessary indulgence, and for unprofitable sloth. They could give themselves up to torture, and to death, in adhering to their Saviour; but you are startled with the least inconvenience, and with the slightest reproach; so that you have neither resolution to name his name, nor to depart from iniquity.

quity. How you will be overwhelmed with shame! and stung with regret! they can never account you brethren, whose dispositions are so different from their own; nor shall you, yourselves, have the presumptuous hope, of associating with such, or enjoying their love. A different portion awaits you, among the "fearful and unbelieving;" who, like you, have, through irresolution, thrown away the joys of Heaven, for these miseries, in which they shall weep and wail, and gnash their teeth for ever.

I call to witness against you, that mother, and her seven children, whom Antiochus, with every species of cruelty, could not induce, notwithstanding their delicate sex, and tender years, to renounce their religion, nor to transgress the commandment of their God. I call the prophets, and apostles, to witness against you, whose fidelity, to God, and religion, was unmoved, by severe affliction, and even by death, in its most terrible appearances. Let the whole army of martyrs, who have fallen, or may yet fall in the glorious cause, from Abel the son of Adam, to Antipas, the inhabitant of Pergamos, and from Antipas, the inhabitant of Pergamos, to him who shall finish this cloud of witnesses, bear testimony against your cowardice, and indifference; your earthliness, and sensuality; your vanity and pride. Let the King of Saints himself, be witness of your conduct, whom, no entreaties, no persuasions, no promises, no threatenings can persuade to follow him, bearing the cross; or excite in you, a resolution like his, who,

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For the "joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." In one word, let that awe you have sometimes felt in this sacred place, these tears you have shed, the achings of heart you have experienced, on some solemn occasions, be witnesses, that your own consciences assent to your guilt, whilst you "neglect this so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and has been confirmed unto us by them who heard him."

O, my brethren, avoid the ruin which I see hanging over you, and ready to burst, with intolerable vengeance, on your devoted heads. Flee for refuge to the hope which is set before you. Seize earnestly that anchor which alone can secure your safety in the impending storm, which shall overwhelm all the wicked, with utter destruction. Jesus offers rest to your weary souls; accept of it with gratitude; for it is more perfect in its kind, it is more lasting in its duration, than any thing, the world with its unbounded flatteries, can ever yield you.

You, who have submitted to the gospel, and make an open profession of Christianity, although you be not called to suffer and to bleed for Christ, you ought, nevertheless, to shew the same spirit which they discovered who have had this severe trial. Allow not your hearts to be engaged with the world; but be as useful as you can with what you have; feed the hungry, clothe the naked, refresh the weary, relieve the destitute. If you are in distress, give an example of patience and

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resignation. Be hearty in your attachment to public worship, and constant in your attendance upon it. Be so mortified to the world, and so strong in the faith, that when death shall remove you hence, by-standers may observe, how Christians can retire from the stage of life, triumphing in their Saviour, and committing their souls into his hand, to dispose of them to their advantage and honor in the unseen world.

S E R.

S E R M O N II.

The Necessity of entering in at the strait Gate;

LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

THE degree of our exertions, in accomplishing any object, is generally determined according to its known importance: The object, proposed in the text, being of the greatest consequence, requires the highest exertion.

The certainty of this will be fully evident, whilst we examine, through divine assistance, the duty, which our Saviour, here, declares to be necessary, and the alarming consideration with which it is charged. The words themselves shall suggest our method, in examining the nature of this duty, and of that consideration.

"The gate," spoken of in my text, first demands our attention.

The gospel dispensation, being pregnant with peculiar advantages to men, is commonly expressed in the New Testament under the allusion of the festival, which the Jews observed, in celebrating their nuptial solemnities. On these happy occasions, the guests were all received at the same gate, or door, which was made narrow, that the porter, with the greater ease and convenience, might keep off

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off the croud, whilst he allowed those who were invited, to enter. Agreeably to this, Christ says to his disciples, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." The things of God, are explained to men, in scripture, by a great variety of allusions, to objects with which they are familiar. These allusions are often changed, that they may present us with new views of the same subject, and render them enlarged and complete. Instruction of a like nature with that afforded in my text, is given to Nicodemus under the notion of a second birth—"Except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit, is spirit."

When we drop both these allusions, the instruction which they give us, is this—that our dispositions and conduct must be changed and sanctified before we can be happy; and that Jesus Christ alone, can communicate the gracious influence whereby this may be effected.

"The gate," with which my text presents us, is "strait."

The spirit of the allusion, of which our Saviour makes use, is here fully supported. There was but one entrance to the nuptial banquet, and that made very narrow; the wicket only being left open for the reception of the guests. The entrance, also, to eternal life, is the same for all. The ministers of Christ have it in commission to point this out to "every creature," and "to guide their feet into the way of peace."

Many

Many things, from the present circumstances of human nature, tend to straiten this entrance so much, that vast multitudes have neither will nor resolution to make it good. These hinderances are unfolded by our Lord, when, reproving their aspiring views, he assures his disciples with much earnestness, "except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." The Christian must cast down every high imagination; he must, like a little child, have his whole dependance on his Heavenly Father; he must be attentive to his instruction, and obedient to his command; having no higher ambition than to please and to enjoy him. Every interfering affection, every jarring interest, and attachments otherwise strong and binding, are on all occasions, to give way when the Saviour appears and requires our service. On no other footing can we be acknowledged as disciples, or numbered among the friends of Jesus. He assured the multitude, during his personal ministry, and he assures us in the most decisive language, "he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: And he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

The folly of man, has given flesh and sense a dangerous ascendant, which we cannot easily moderate, nor restrain. We dote on what is seen and

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temporal, to the neglect of things unseen and eternal. The indulgence of our appetites, the accommodating our manners to the humours of those around us, the securing some temporary convenience, or advantage, engage our most earnest attention and keen pursuit. We cannot easily shake off these fetters nor act like men.

The difficulty, particularly at first, is very great. The Ethiopian is as likely to change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as a man wedded to the flesh and lust to be divorced from them. The prejudices of self-love are not to be removed; the influence of corruption to be checked, or the necessary duties of mortification to be performed, by fruitless wishes and feeble exertions. The soul will here find employment for its utmost vigour; powerfully supported, and highly improved by the grace of God. Such opposition, from our own depravity, to what is becoming in rational and immortal creatures, alone can render religion difficult, and straiten the entrance upon a holy life.

Be our difficulties what they may, duty and interest make it necessary to "enter in at the strait gate."

The persons, invited to the festivals alluded to in this passage, were obliged to make their way through the usual entrances, into the nuptial chamber, before they could partake of the entertainment which was provided: We also, that we may become members of the kingdom of God, must enter upon a religious life, by improving Jesus Christ, as the salvation, whom God hath "prepared before the face of all people."

A guilty soul, like the ocean in a storm, has no rest. Our own reflection, in such circumstances, condemns us. Fearful and suspicious, we lose all confidence in God. Future prospects awake the most intolerable apprehensions. It is on this account that faith in Christ becomes the first step in a holy life. Hereby we discover the remedy of past folly, and a certain source of future hope. The tumult of the passions is hereby stilled, and an anchor, by which we ride in safety, is lodged in a sure place. Accordingly, when the jailor of Philippi was alarmed at his danger, and anxious to be saved, the apostle directs him to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," as what alone could effectually remove his fears and secure his safety. The Saviour himself, had, long before, proclaimed the same doctrine, in the audience of a great multitude—"Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." A soul oppressed and weighed down, under the apprehension of guilt and misery, is effectually relieved by viewing the suitable characters which our Redeemer sustains, and the important work he has accomplished, with a steady, believing application to him for relief. The mercy of God, in the exercises of such a faith, is distinctly seen; who lays aside his displeasure and receives our submission; who accepts our persons, and heals our backslidings; who provides for our welfare, and upholds the steps by which it is secured.

Such a faith must be allowed, whenever it is understood, to be an active principle. It brings us,

us, for the recovery of health, to "the balm of Gilead," and to "the physician" who is there. It engrafts us into the vine, from which sap and nourishment are communicated, to enable us to bring forth fruit. It is the mean, which God makes use of, to renew the traces of his own image, on the heart, and to create us again unto good works. It produces love to God and to man, and triumphs over the vanities and pleasures of life. Vicious habits are hereby corrected, groveling thoughts are removed, and a healthful vigour diffused through every faculty; disposing, and strengthening us to perform the whole will of God.

Religion, in general, is frequently in scripture, particularly in the New Testament, described by this great principle of faith: Because, keeping us near him, who alone can instruct and justify us; can make us holy now, and secure complete redemption for us afterwards; it removes all incapacity for obedience, and engages us with new, and urgent motives to our duty. When the "weary and heavy laden," are, in consequence of his invitation, supposed to have come to Christ, who gives them rest, they are immediately presented with his "yoke," and offered his "burden," as capable of fulfilling the most active service, and sustaining the severest trial.

Gratitude, duty, and interest, unite their influence in persuading the believer, "to cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," and to become ambitious of "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Shall he pollute that nature,

ture, which is sanctified at no less a price, as God himself declares, than "his own blood?" Shall a capacity for holiness, conferred on him anew, be neglected? Shall eternal life be in his reach, and excite no ambition, nor no exertion? It is impossible, my brethren: Individuals, in these circumstances, will give earnest heed to "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report," to whatever is virtuous, and praise-worthy, and must "do" them.

Faith, therefore, being in these respects, not only the first step in a religious life, but also the firm basis on which it rests, and the main-spring which gives it motion, may well be considered as the "entering in at the strait gate," required of us in my text, whereby, we are introduced to a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees, well-refined." Those who do not secure admission to this banquet, nor partake of what it provides, by the faith which God requires, are pronounced to remain in perishing circumstances: "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned."

The faith of the operation of God, which men must receive before they can be saved, provides so fully for their becoming obedient, that any, who allow, or continue even in one sin, never partake of it, nor do they receive the least advantage from it; to them alone, on account of their lusts and indulgences, the gate is straitened and the way made narrow. Christ, as the Apostle informs

informs those to whom he writes, is the "propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Admission at the strait gate being of so much importance, we must "strive to enter in."

No allusion can fully represent the things of God. New circumstances, on this account, are often added to improve the allusion and render it as perfect as possible. The "striving," required in my text, is such a circumstance. It supposes the strait gate to be beset with enemies, through whom we must force our way. The opposition we may expect, in entering upon a religious life, is here evidently intimated. The Devil, the world, and the flesh dispute our entrance, and bid us defiance. The expression in the original, which we now examine, represents exertions of the highest nature, where the utmost strength is put forth; like Athletics wrestling in the Olympic games, or contending parties fighting in war.

The persons, who contended in the games, which were very famous at the time when the Apostle wrote, were temperate in the use of every sensual indulgence; lest excess of any kind, should enervate them, when their exercises required the greatest activity. In the hour of action, every nerve was strained to gain their point. Like them, men must neglect no circumstance, which may enable

ble them so to run, that they may obtain; if they aspire after the name of Christians, and are ambitious to obtain their glorious reward.

The flesh stands first in the rank of our enemies, which makes such impression against us, as leads on the rest to certain victory. Were self-government maintained, we should stand firm; but irregular appetites, and restless passions, remove our guard, and lay us open to assault. These, like so many dead weights, clog the mind and hinder any progress in religion. Against these, our whole force is, first, to be directed. We must "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth" most "easily beset us;" whilst we moderate excessive care, about earthly things, and prevailing affection towards them. The body must be kept under, and brought into subjection, that none of its demands may be answered, which are inconsistent with religion. It must be a constant exercise to be sincere and steady in all our transactions of a religious or secular nature, that we may possess a conscience "void of offence towards God and towards man." Hereby corrupt biasses may be corrected, and the reign of lust and pleasure gradually destroyed.

The world comes next on the field, armed with weapons of the most dangerous kind, against a degenerate nature. Its carnal pleasures, its specious gains, its ambitious pursuits, correspond so exactly to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," which are strong principles in a sensual heart, that it is difficult, I had almost

almost said impossible, successfully to oppose them. Just views of the nature of these things, must begin the opposition. The time of enjoying them is short, and they often pass away before even that is expired. They are inconsistent with our loving God, and enjoying his favour. They interrupt our present peace, and darken our future prospects. Cost what it will, we must quit their service, and resist their baleful influence.

The Devil improves the advantages which the world and the flesh afford him; and follows closely every victory which he may obtain. He lays his schemes deep, and is unwearied in his malicious efforts. He knows human nature, and artfully addresses his temptation to the humour of individuals. Let the voluptuous speak out; have you not often been drawn to your cups by a secret and apparently irresistible impulse, at the very moment, when a sober thought has admonished you of your folly? Let the sensual say, if you have not sometimes kept your guilty appointments, with an aching heart and disturbed mind, but you are hurried towards them, you know not how, and have yielded to what at the time you could not approve? Ye worldly minded, be for once sincere; have not your courses, on many occasions, appeared vain? Did you not seem to be sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind? Yet you go on without ceasing from your folly, or amending your past faults. Is not this exactly the case? and how shall we account for it? How else, but by discovering the practices of the great enemy of souls,
who

who inflames your lust and encourages your folly ; who leads you captive at his pleasure ; and hurries you on to destruction ; but whom the Christian continually resists stedfast in the faith ?

These views of the enemies we have to encounter, discover fully the necessity of the striving, required of us in the text. Much courage must be shewn, if we would be successful. Many have observed the need of a reformation in heart and conduct, but the strength of evil habits, the allurements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, have often extinguished good desires, and rendered promising beginnings ineffectual. A real Christian has his heart in the work. He knows his life is at stake, therefore he becomes undaunted and resolute. Opposition only confirms his spirit, and pushes him on with encreasing earnestness. Past conduct, of which he is now ashamed, was attended neither with profit nor comfort ; therefore he can no longer “ live the rest of his time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” A voice from Heaven inspires his whole soul, and animates his steps—“ watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”

Great diligence attends his courage. He carefully examines where his strength lies, and exerts it to the utmost. Diffident of his own heart, he maintains a steady trust in the grace, and strength of Christ, for his support. This engages him in prayer and meditation, in private and family devotion, in all the acts of public worship, and engages him in these as the appointment of God, to

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which

which he has promised that those who thus "wait upon him, shall renew their strength: They shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

Courage and diligence, in opposing our spiritual enemies, must early be discovered; "now," whilst it is "the accepted time," and "the day of salvation." The present is the moment for improvement; to-morrow is not ours; and we know not what it may bring forth. If we delay, our enemies gain ground, and we are undone; but an immediate effort against them may be successful.

Perseverance is always necessary. Many have run well, and yet have stopt short before their course was finished. Many have fought bravely for a time, and have, notwithstanding, laid down their weapons, before the warfare was over. Many have received the faith, apparently in the love of it; and then by and by have been offended. But it is a patient continuance in well-doing, by which the Christian seeks for glory, and honor and immortality. He exerts himself to the utmost, whilst, at the same time, he commits his soul, to his Heavenly Father, to "keep him from falling, and to present him faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Strengthened from above, he is "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as he knows that his labour is not in vain in the Lord."

It is by being resolute in the service of God,
and

and diligent in fulfilling it ; it is by beginning in time, and persevering unto the end, that we must " strive to enter in at the strait gate."

If it be possible for the importance of any concern, to rouse your attention, and animate your diligence, it must be done by the one under consideration. The favour of God, and the happiness which this imparts to a rational and immortal nature, both in the present and in the future world, is here proposed as the object of your ambition, and of your most earnest pursuit. Can you, my brethren, rise up early, and sit up late? Can you eat the bread of sorrow, and labour hard in obtaining the necessities and conveniences of a present passing life? What care, what industry, what exertions think you to be necessary, when life and immortality are at stake?

Lose not your labour on what does not satisfy, and cannot profit you in the issue. Whilst you fulfil the duties arising from the relations in which you stand to each other ; whilst you are attentive to your respective callings, and employ the six days of the week in the labour and work which your circumstances require, be at the same time fervent in spirit, serving the Lord ; let the doing of his will become as your meat and drink ; and let the prevailing principle of action, be zeal for his honour, whom we are taught to consider as " the God of peace, that brought again from the dead " our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep ; " and be you confident, that through the blood of " the everlasting covenant," he will " make you " perfect

“ perfect in every good work to do his will ; work-
 “ ing in you, that which is well-pleasing in his
 “ sight, through Jesus Christ ; to whom be glory
 “ for ever and ever, Amen.”

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S E R M O N III.

The Necessity of entering in at the strait Gate,

LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

[The second sermon on this text.]

HAVING, in my former discourse, examined the duty, which our Saviour, in the text, declares to be necessary, "strive to enter in at the strait gate:" We are now to attend to the alarming consideration with which this duty is urged upon us, "many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

An opposition is here stated between "seeking to enter in," which is found to be ineffectual, and the "striving," to which my text secures the fullest success. Multitudes, like Herod, hear the word of God gladly, and do many things in consequence of this; yet they come short of the kingdom of Heaven, through a partial obedience, and an irresolute conduct. Much has been lost, and may yet be so, either by the great defects of those who have done something in religion, but not enough; or by not attending to it until it be too late.

We begin with the great defects referred to in this passage, which are the blemish of those who do something in religion, but not enough; whereby their hopes are disappointed, and make them
ashamed.

ashamed. These are taken notice of in the verses which follow my text, "when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are: Then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." The Evangelist Matthew speaks the same language, mentioning, besides, some new pretences, by which men lay claim to Heaven, but they shall at last be certainly over-ruled: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name, done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Some found their hopes of future happiness on this, that their parents, in baptism, have dedicated them to the service of Christ as his disciples. In so many words they acknowledge what their parents have done, and call themselves the servants of the Lord Jesus. But like the unbelieving Jew, who placed his hope of obtaining the divine favour, upon his descent, from Abraham, and the

te of circumcision which distinguished his descendants; they think it enough for them that they have been brought within the pale of the church and bear the name of Christians; whilst the heart estranged from God, and the conduct directly opposite to his law.

The claim of others rises higher. They have eaten and drunk in his presence, and he has taught in their streets." This plea shall, in all likelihood, be used in the most literal sense, by many, who having lived in the days when Christ was on earth, were among the nine thousand, whom, as the evangelist informs us, he miraculously fed with a few loaves, and some small fishes; or who mingled with the multitude that daily attended his ministry. In a more extensive sense, it may be used by individuals in all succeeding ages, who, partaking of the ordinance of the Lord's supper, and enjoying the benefit of a faithful ministry, have increased indeed, in valuable knowledge, but have not, in the mean time, brought forth correspondent fruit.

The claim still rises and seems to be considerable. Men have filled distinguished places in the church; they have been eminently furnished for their offices, and highly serviceable unto others. But they were not taught by the instructions which they gave; nor did they tread the steps which they marked out for their fellow-men. The whole description, characterizes persons, who rest in the privileges they enjoy, without improving them, and who please themselves with the slightest appearances

ances of religion, whilst it has no root in the heart. They trust to a bare name ; they pride themselves on their important opportunities, and expect much from their high stations, whilst they neither do the will of God, nor cease from the practise of iniquity.

As numbers do something in religion, but not enough, thereby " seeking to enter in at the strait gate : " Numbers also neglect it entirely, until a very late hour.

This neglect seems particularly to be intended in my text. For the master of the house is represented as having risen from his seat, and having with his own hand, shut the door against every one who may afterwards arrive. In which case no calls can be answered, nor entreaties heard. The door was once opened and the entertainment was ready for their refreshment. They did not, however, in time, make good their entrance, nor take their seat, therefore they are left among the undistinguished croud, in darkness, in neglect, and in want.

There is a day of mercy, and a time when a resolute striving shall succeed ; but beyond the determined moment, every effort shall be in vain. Like an ineffectual wish, or a feeble attempt when fortitude and courage are necessary, it can only reflect shame and disappointment upon the unhappy individual. Accordingly, we find the prophet very urgent with sinners to improve the present moment, lest their opportunity be lost—
" Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call

" ye

“ye upon him while he is near.” The Apostle Paul cautions the Corinthians against receiving the grace of God in vain; directing their attention to the “accepted time,” and “the day of salvation,” which was then present; lest misimproved, it might leave them destitute and undone. God assures us, that the period actually hastens upon sinners, when “they shall call upon him, but he will not answer; they shall seek him early, but they shall not find him.”

Men may set at nought all the divine counsel so often, they may refuse his reproof so long, that their ruin shall be determined, even on this side the grave, as reprobate silver, which men reject entirely as useless. The spirit of God may cease to strive with them, whereby their case shall become as desperate as the case of those sinners, who were carried away with the flood. The things which belong to their peace may be hid from their eyes, as they were hid from the eyes of Jerusalem, that highly favoured, but ungrateful city. This is generally the case with all who live forgetful of God, and never think of his service, until sickness or death force such thoughts upon their mind. It is always so with those who die in their sins, and take their departure hence, before their peace be made with God.

The persons, who “seek to enter in,” by some feeble, heartless efforts, or at a late unseasonable hour, “shall not be able.”

There was only one entrance to the festival chamber, which was shut as soon as the guests

were all received. If any refused to make good the usual entrance, or came to it when it was too late, they were excluded. In like manner, whoever does not believe and obey the gospel, with a steady and seasonable improvement of it, cannot receive the shelter from eternal ruin which it affords.

No external act of religion, whatever stress we ourselves may lay upon it, no form of godliness, however high it may raise our character in the estimation of others, can be acceptable unto God, or give us well-grounded expectations for the time to come, unless the heart be engaged, and the whole conduct be made holy. This is represented in an affecting light, when God speaks against Israel—"I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." Polluted and disobedient, they were willing to compound matters, and to make up, by a strict attention to the ritual, what was wanting in the practice of religion. This, God rejects with great indignation; "to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: Your new moons, and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: Your hands are full of blood." There was no way of finding acceptance, but by an immediate compliance with the command, "wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings

doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil,
 "learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the op-
 "pressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the wi-
 "dow." In these circumstances, and in these alone
 they were encouraged—"Come now, and let us
 "reason together saith the Lord: Though your
 "sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow;
 "though they be red like crimson, they shall be
 "as wool."

Unless men give up with every sin, even the
 most beloved, they cannot be saved. The young
 man, whose fair character engaged our Saviour's
 attention, and regard, was "not far from the king-
 "dom of God," wanting only "one thing," but
 that one want was, in all likelihood, his ruin. Had
 his heart been disengaged, he had immediately
 complied with the call of Jesus. He was joined
 beforehand to the world, and sacrificed his best
 interests in that service. The pharisee in the pa-
 rable, was not blemished with the faults of others;
 he was no extortioner nor unjust person, he ab-
 horred uncleanness of every kind; but his pride
 and self-conceit was offensive unto God, and sent
 him from the temple, with less notice and appro-
 bation than the guilty, but contrite publican. The
 Apostle supposes that he may give his goods to
 feed the poor, and his body to be burned in de-
 fence of religion, and yet receive from thence,
 no advantage, were he destitute of that good-will,
 and that piety, of which, by such conduct, he
 courted the applause. The heart is open to God,
 who sees through the closest disguise. The allow-
 ing

ing of ourselves in one sin of any kind, and continuing in it, will draw down upon us his heavy indignation, and exclude us from his presence. The man who keeps "the whole law, and yet fails in "one point," is considered as "guilty of all."

The practising the whole of religion for a time, and then returning to the ways of sin, shall be found as dangerous as the ceasing from one species of wickedness, whilst we allow ourselves in another. Perseverance finishes a religious character. Without perseverance, it is as if we had never borne it. "If the righteous man forsake his righteousness, "his righteousness shall not be remembered; but "in the sin that he hath sinned, in that shall he die." The Apostle Peter speaks of some, who, "after "they have escaped the pollutions of the world, "through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour "Jesus Christ, are again entangled therein and "overcome; the latter end is worse with them "than the beginning." It is on the same principle that the Apostle Paul informs the Hebrews, "ye have need of patience, that after ye have "done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. Now the just shall live by faith; but if "any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Whoever, therefore, allows himself even in one sin, or returns to sin when he had forsaken it, shall certainly be treated as guilty, and shut out from the kingdom of Heaven.

These observations prepare us for knowing, that a late attention to religion is always dangerous. If one sin be able to ruin those whose character has other-

otherwise been fair; if a return to folly, blots out
 the remembrance of much labour and mortifica-
 tion, what can be expected from a whole life of
 religion and sensuality? Habits of evil are now
 confirmed, and the soul very unfit to stand before
 Holy God. A few sighs, which the present
 warm occasions; prayers, which are very confused,
 and can be considered in no other light than words
 of course; and resolutions taken up, when the
 space of performing them is run out, cannot be
 thought sufficient to stem the current of guilt;
 which has been rising for a succession of years;
 nor to gain a favourable regard from the judge of
 all the earth. It is no less than a miracle of un-
 common grace, and distinguishing mercy, if a sinner
 be received, who delays faith and repentance
 until the last. Miracles are seldom wrought,
 and never, but on very necessary occasions. And
 at best, whatever steps can be taken in religion
 on a death-bed, are only the seeking to enter in;
 which my text declares to be of no avail. Then
 the command of Christ is fixing the unalterable
 decree, with respect to such unhappy individuals;
 "he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he that
 is filthy, let him be filthy still." And whenever
 the command is gone forth, whenever the decree
 is fixed, no entreaties, and no efforts shall stand
 them in any stead; but "he that made them,
 will not have mercy on them, and he that for-
 med them will shew them no favour."

The number of those, whose expectations are
 at last to be disappointed, is very considerable.

"Many

Many will seek to enter in, but shall not be able.

The crowds who may be supposed to have gotten around the door of the festival chamber, but who never tasted of the entertainment which was there provided, may represent the multitudes who shall at last fall short of the kingdom of Heaven. When we set aside all those who neglect religion entirely, how many rest on the slightest attention to it! The bare name of Christians satisfies some. A few partial compliances with what the gospel requires, in the doctrines which it proposes to our faith, and the precepts which it lays down for our practice, is enough for others. A considerable number put off all attention to the matter, until the evil day overtakes them, and leaves them no time for serious and important business.

When I look around, and consider how men in general are affected to religion, what a vast proportion of them seem to be asleep. If they bestir themselves at all, it is only like the ineffectual efforts, which we imagine ourselves to put forth in a dream, when we struggle hard under many apparent incumbrances, but never gain our point. Is Christianity a warfare, which requires great watchfulness and active courage? Then, most certainly, whoever may be engaged in this service, he is not who is the slave of appetites and passions, and degrades his nature far below its original importance. Is Christianity a race, wherein every nerve must be strained that we may gain the prize? The worldly-minded man is no contender here. His traffic, his lands, his connexions bind him down to the earth

earth, and incapacitate him for spiritual exercises. the Christian faith a treasure, which ought to be valued before the riches of India, and before all that is accounted precious on earth? It evidently not estimated at a just rate, by him, who, for the lust, or for one favourite indulgence, gives it entirely up.

The careless and irreligious are confirmed in these characters, by the practice of the world. They act like others, and cannot assume singularity. A poor plea, which can only pass for a little. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished:" Be their numbers, be their boldness what it will, God "shall speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Our Saviour appears in my text with incomparable dignity; "many, *I say* unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

He was now tabernacled on earth, in human nature. He appeared as another man, without "form or comeliness." His humble appearance was in condescension to our weakness, and for our advantage. His glory, sometimes, shone forth amidst his humiliation. He often asserts it on proper occasions, and particularly at present. He speaks with certainty concerning the future circumstances

cumstances of men. He knew their real characters, and makes them acquainted with their certain destination. He assures them as the "faithful and true witness," that the faint, sickly efforts, where by a vast proportion of mankind, seek to make good their entrance into Heaven, can never succeed. He foretels, as the great prophet whom God raised up for his people, the miscarriage of a considerable number through their own inactivity and neglect. He speaks as one to whom all judgment is committed, and makes known the sentence which he shall soon pronounce, with awful solemnity against every one, be their attainment or their pretensions of the highest nature, who continue in the practice of iniquity.

As sure, therefore, as "righteousness is the girdle of the Redeemer's loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins;" as sure as he is the prophet of God, and discovers what an unchangeable decree has established; as sure as we shall all stand before his judgment seat, and receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it has been good or whether it has been evil, so sure is it, that the "fearful and unbelieving," whom no motives can encourage, nor evidence persuade, to the uniform practice, nor to the steady faith of the gospel, that the "abominable and murderers," who devote themselves to sensual affections and pursuits, that "whoremongers and sorcerers," that "idolaters and all liars," who allow themselves in words or in actions, to violate the eternal and invariable laws of truth and of purity, be the amount

of their number ever so great, they shall not in these circumstances, under any disguise, or by any effort, make their way into the kingdom of Heaven; but the blackness of everlasting darkness, is reserved as their certain portion.

From the consideration which is now before us, we ought to be persuaded to make religion, in good earnest, the chief business of life. We ought to cease from this moment to do evil, and learn to do well. We, hereby, comply with the Saviour's design in this passage; who, according to his usual custom, improves a trivial question, which one of the croud put him, concerning the number of those who are to be saved, for giving instruction of the utmost importance. He assures us, that many shall be disappointed in their expectations at last, and presses this consideration on the conscience, that every individual may be on his guard, against adding to that number, or sharing in their disgrace.

If an empty name, and misimproved privileges; if a partial submission, and late endeavours; if any thing short of a thorough reformation, and universal holiness, be found refuges of lies, which leave those who shelter therein, helpless and exposed, how should this rouse the secure, and animate the indolent? how should it awake the sleeping sinner, and stir up the slumbering saint? Your dreams, however pleasant, your hopes, however high, will leave you sorrowful and disappointed, unless you take the alarm, and act a resolute and safe part. Your neglect of doing the will of God, and

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your continuance in iniquity, will, most assuredly, be your ruin ; which cannot possibly be prevented, except by an immediate return to the service of God, and an active perseverance in it. We know, on the highest authority, that " God will render to
 " every man according to his deeds: To them,
 " who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek
 " for glory, and honor, and immortality, eter-
 " nal life ; but unto them that are contentious,
 " and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath ; tribulation and
 " anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil,
 " of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile ; but glory, honor and peace, to every man that worketh
 " good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile."

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S E R M O N IV.

The rich Man and Lazarus on Earth.

LUKE. xvi. 25.

"But Abraham said, son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

OUR Saviour, in the former part of the discourse recorded in this chapter, persuades his hearers to make a wise use of their present advantages, that they may contribute to their future happiness. To give his persuasions the greater effect, he, in the parable of which my text makes a part, draws aside the veil which conceals futurity from our eyes, and discovers the circumstances of men in the other world, to depend upon their behaviour in this.

My text places the rich man and Lazarus in two very different lights. In the one, we view their respective circumstances when on earth; in the other, we see them in their different allotments in a separate state.

Our view at present, is to be confined to their respective circumstances when on earth.

"A certain rich man" is spoken of in the parable. If this be a real history, as some suppose, the name of the person is concealed. Our Saviour always avoided giving room for prejudice, either
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against his person or doctrine; which must have arisen, among the relations and friends of the deceased, had any particular individual been instanced. If the description before us, as is most likely, be parabolical, a name is purposely avoided; and it becomes an expressive circumstance. It shews in a strong manner, that men of affluence, who are not kind and helpful unto others, whatever pains they take to perpetuate their remembrance among succeeding ages; although they give their names to their lands, and entail them upon children's children, yet their memory shall rot; for it shall either be entirely forgotten, or else be held in great contempt. Such is the intimation given in the parable, concerning the person who is there introduced. But he was "a rich man." He had personal and real estate; money and lands; treasures hoarded up, and treasures laid out at interest.

This rich man appeared in great magnificence: He was "clothed in purple and fine linen."

Fine linen, among the ancients, was a very costly article, and worn only by the affluent. Purple was the dress of princes, and of those who filled eminent stations. The purple and fine linen, therefore, characterize a person who shone in all the grandeur and pomp of high life.

This rich man "fared sumptuously every day." His table was supplied with all the varieties which industry and art could procure. The side-board was richly adorned with plate, and loaded with liquors which were rare, and the best of their kind.

kind. The servants attended in gaudy livery; And the guests who sat around the table, were all distinguished by their opulence and rank. But, may not a man be rich? may he not array himself in purple and fine linen? may he not fare sumptuously every day, and yet preserve innocence of character, provided his circumstances allow it? certainly he may. But he must neither have arisen to his eminence, through fraudulent, or oppressive measures; nor must he run, in the enjoyment of it, to dangerous excess.

The fault exposed in the parable, is fully expressed, when this rich man is said, during life, to have received "*his good things.*"

His heart seems to have been too much set upon rich apparel and sumptuous diet, and his ambition to have been confined within a very despicable sphere. Give him the means of satisfying "the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life," and he desired no more. The pleasures of devotion, and the raptures with which the devout are sometimes affected, whilst they anticipate future happiness, never warmed his thoughts, nor influenced his conduct.

The affluence he enjoyed, and the grandeur which his circumstances enabled him to support, were no evidence that God loved him more than others, or that his satisfaction, on the whole, greatly exceeded theirs. It must be acknowledged, that he had an opportunity of being extensively useful, but throwing it away on trifling pursuits, it can only be considered as "a price in the hand of a fool," who has no heart to use it. The

The indulging of our own ease and pleasure, the laying out what we have in extravagant dress and expensive entertainments; or the being at unnecessary cost of any kind, without considering the distresses of the poor, or the miseries of the afflicted, and without taking any steps for their comfort and relief, is, in the highest degree, offensive unto God. In this, the guilt of the rich man described in the parable, principally consists. He provided for himself alone, but hardened his heart, when the affliction and poverty of his neighbour called aloud for his tender sympathy, and immediate help.

We shall, for a moment, withdraw our attention from the lustre which such a magnificence throws around us, to an object found at the entrance of the rich man's palace.

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate."

This man's character is spoken of in such a manner, as leads us to suppose that it was well known; and the circumstances which are here mentioned, ascertain its real worth. Our Saviour's introducing a particular individual by name, in this description, is no accidental circumstance. It expresses this much, that the individual in question was a deserving person; one who feared God, and was just and dutiful unto others. But he was a "beggar," reduced, perhaps, to this disagreeable condition, by sickness and infirmity. Had his distress been the effect either of idleness or extravagance, the compassionate, whilst they abhorred his vices, would have pitied the misery into which they

they had plunged him: But, when the hand of God is plainly discovered, in laying this poor man in the dust, whilst his afflictions were not occasioned by his own folly, there is every thing to raise compassion, without any circumstance which can have the least tendency to cool or to abate it.

And Lazarus met with compassion from some neighbours, or friends, who, unable to supply him with cordials, or even to furnish such diet and clothing as was proper and decent, did what was in their power, and shewed themselves forward to procure him relief. They carried him to a rich man's gate, and left him there, in hopes of such notice as might have proved a very seasonable support, without degrading the rich man's rank, or putting him to the smallest inconvenience.

If men cannot help the poor, or comfort the afflicted with their substance, they may do many things which are equally effectual for this purpose. They may visit them in their afflictions, and "speak a word in season" to their dejected spirits. They may acquaint those, who are able to help them, with their circumstances, and take proper steps for introducing them into their presence, in order to excite and to encourage, by the sight of woe, a becoming charity. Accordingly, poor Lazarus is placed near the rich man's abode. Had his charity not been so strong as to induce him diligently to seek out proper objects of it, yet when that object was before him, it was likely that his eye might affect his heart, and that his affluence might for once flow in a useful channel.

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Lazarus was, in every respect, a proper object of pity, being sick as well as poor; for in the course of the description, he is represented to be full of "sores."

Acute disorders are painful and afflictive, but they very soon deliver the patient from suspense, either restoring him to health, or putting an immediate end to his connexion with present things. Chronical disorders are more slow and inveterate, and when attended with obstinate ulcers, as in the case before us, they become oppressive to the patient, loathsome to the beholder, and perplexing to the most skilful physician. When Satan was allowed to afflict Job to the utmost of his power, provided his life was spared, he fixed upon the disorder we are now speaking of, and brought biles upon him from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, whereby every degree of comfort was removed, and life itself became a burthen. In like circumstances, did the afflicted Lazarus now appear before the gate of a rich man; "yea," to complete his wretchedness, "the dogs came and licked his sores," which lay uncovered in the open air. The descriptive language of the prophet, may apply to the present case, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

The patience and the modesty of Lazarus are very

very remarkable, and recommend him to the particular regard of the compassionate. He desires only "to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table."

He was neither ambitious of a rich mess, nor of such a quantity as might be unreasonable for him to expect. The crumbs, which the dogs usually received, were all he sought. No complaining word drops from his mouth, nor is any impertinent outcry ever heard. He makes known his wants in the simplest manner, and then rests, with submission, on the generosity of his wealthy neighbour. Contrite, and humble, he accommodates his mind to his circumstances; whilst, at the same time, he takes every lawful step to procure relief; entrusting himself with Him who has given to all their lot, and who assures the poor that he will satisfy them with bread.

Lazarus, whose carriage, whose character, whose circumstances, were so much in his favour, and rendered him, in all respects, a proper object of charity, was greatly slighted by the rich man. He did not, indeed, abuse him; from which good manners possibly with-held him, but he overlooked him. He did not forbid him his gate, but he allowed him to sit there unnoticed. He did him no harm, but at the same time he did him no good. He neither took cognizance of his situation, nor did he order him relief: He neither fed nor clothed him: He neither took him in, nor did he administer any cordial for his comfort. Such neglect is highly offensive unto God. Accordingly,

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our blessed Saviour assures us, that in his procedure with mankind, at the day of judgment, he will attend, in a particular manner, to their works of charity and mercy ; and will, in proportion as these have been performed or neglected, reward or punish them through eternity. " When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the Holy Angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations ; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats : And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : Naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me ye
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"curfed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the
 "devil and his angels. For I was an hungred,
 "and ye gave me no meat : I was thirfty, and ye
 "gave me no drink : I was a ftranger, and ye took
 "me not in : Naked, and ye clothed me not :
 "Sick, and in prifon, and ye vifited me not. Then
 "fhall they alfo answer him, faying, Lord, when
 "faw we thee an hungred, or athirft, or a ftran-
 "ger, or naked, or fick, or in prifon, and did not
 "minifter unto thee ? Then fhall he answer them,
 "faying, verily I fay unto you, in as much as ye
 "did it not to one of the leaft of thefe, ye did it
 "not to me. And thefe fhall go away into ever-
 "lafting punifhment ; but the righteous into life
 "eternal."

It may be neceffary, before I proceed further
 in the illuftration of my text, to attend to fome of
 the leffons, which the different circumftances of
 the rich man and Lazarus, and their refpective
 conduct to one another, as it has now been explain-
 ed, are intended to give us. We learn from thence,

Firft, That God diftributes the goods and ills of
 this life, in fuch a manner, as makes it impoffible
 to judge certainly of a character, either by their
 being given or with-held. The diftinction of
 characters arifeth, not fo much from our external
 circumftances, as from fulfilling the duties, which,
 in thefe circumftances, are binding upon us. It
 is a general rule, by which God regulates the af-
 fairs of mankind, that "the poor fhall never ceafe
 "out of the land." But poverty and riches, honor
 and neglect, fuccefs and difappointment, are par-
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celled out, promiscuously, to the learned and the ignorant, to the deserving and the undeserving, to the righteous and the wicked. Solomon informs us, after a very attentive examination of the matter, "that the race is not to the swift, nor the
" battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the
" wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding,
" nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and
" chance happeneth to them all."

Each of these circumstances has its respective advantage and disadvantage. If we confine our attention entirely to a present life, the advantage is evidently on the side of the rich man; but when the present is remembered in connexion with the future state, the advantage seems rather to be on the other side. The rich, it is true, have it in their power to do a great deal of good; but their temptations to pride, and to sensuality, to forgetfulness of God, and to disrespect for his Providence, are strong, and suit the present propensities of human nature so much, that nothing short of the powerful assistance of the grace of God, can lessen these temptations, and destroy their influence. But poverty has a natural tendency to render men meek and humble, to break their spirits, and to mortify them to the world, whereby they are prepared to receive with joy, the hopes and consolations of the gospel. This state, however, exposes men to care and detraction; it makes way for temptations to deceit and to injustice; and it lays a foundation for repining at the dispensations of Providence, and envying those whose circumstances are more favourable.

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To avoid the temptations of either of these states, it will be necessary to bring our wants into as narrow a compass as possible. We must consider wholesome food, and decent cloathing for ourselves and families to be sufficient. We must retrench what is evidently superfluous, and lessen also the number of the things which we have been accustomed to account necessary. When our desires are fully moderated, and every becoming retrenchment made, what is over may be laid out with great interest, in relieving the helpless and destitute.

A middle state between the extremes of poverty and wealth, may possibly be found more favourable than any of the former states, to the circumstances of an immortal creature, preparing for eternal existence. On this principle, Agur's prayer is founded; which Divine wisdom and Heavenly prudence will teach each of us to make our own; "two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." If we have food to supply the present necessity; if we have such raiment as is a decent wear, and a sufficient defence against the weather; if we have an abode wherein we can find a comfortable shelter, although we know not how we shall be fed another year, although we have few changes of raiment, although we

we only sit tenants at pleasure, yet, even in such circumstances, we have that, for which Agur prays, and are bound, without care or anxiety, to leave our circumstances for the time to come, entirely with him, "whose tender mercies are over all his works."

That part of the parable which is now before us, teaches us,

Secondly, to improve the advantages which we enjoy for the good of others.

Our advantages may not be near so great as in the instance of the rich man, to which we have been attending; where the description is enlivened with every circumstance that can enlarge his sphere of usefulness, adding, thereby, the highest aggravation to his criminal neglect. Some may possibly expect, that God will overlook their neglect of charity and mercy, on supposition that they are not here characterized, because they do not acknowledge themselves to be rich, and cannot array themselves in purple and fine linen, nor fare sumptuously every day. If such are not included in the words of the parable, they certainly are in the spirit of it, which instructs individuals to improve their respective influence, and power, and substance for the advantage of others. There is a beautiful allegory, preserved from one of the Jewish writers, to this purpose, where "the world" is represented as "a house; Heaven, the roof; the stars, the lights; the earth, with its fruits, a table spread; the master of the house, the Holy and blessed God; man is the steward, into whose

whose hand the goods of this house are delivered; if he behave well, he shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord; if not, he shall be turned out of his stewardship." This allegory represents the share, allotted to individuals, of present things, to be a trust for which we are accountable, and we shall certainly be disgraced, if we neglect to improve it, or squander it away to no valuable purpose.

The scripture does not exempt even him, who earns his bread by "the sweat of his face," from the necessary duty of giving alms; requiring him to "labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." The mite of the poor widow was more acceptable to God than the rich gifts of those who lived in abundance. If the labourer is to separate a part of his scanty allowance to charitable purposes; if the widow receives high praise for her pious disposition, when her offering, although inconsiderable in itself, was, the greatest her circumstances could allow, surely persons who live in ease and affluence, are obliged by gratitude and by duty to deny themselves the luxuries and extravagances of life, that they may have a larger supply, in reserve, for the needy and destitute.

God accepts of a man according to what he has. He is pleased with a charitable disposition, and with such expressions of kindness to others as may be in his power. Attending the distressed, is accepted, when we cannot relieve them; ministering unto them with our person, when we can give them

them no supply from our purse ; speaking a word in season to them when weary, when cordials of no kind are at our command : Such conduct entitles the individual to the reward of the highest charity, and shall receive from our Saviour, at the great day, a very public and honorable approbation ; “ I was sick, and ye visited me.”

In the various distributions of Providence whereby one abounds, and another suffers want, God tries the charity of the one, and the patience of the other ; and approves of them just as they stand or fall in the trial ; and he, by no means, leaves it to the pleasure of the individual, whether he is to assist, or with-hold his assistance from his distressed neighbour, but has given very strict charge with respect to it—“ the poor shall never cease out of the land ; therefore I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in the land.” Particular privileges are secured for those who comply with this command ; “ blessed is he that considereth the poor ; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” Job was a glorious instance, both of such conduct, and of such blessings : “ When the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me : Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me ; and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy : I put on righteousness, and it clothed me : My judgment was

as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the
 "blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a fa-
 "ther to the poor; and the cause which I knew
 "not, I searched out."

God requires us to be kind and to be helpful;
 to be forgiving and compassionate to one another,
 as the most acceptable expression of gratitude for
 his kindness and help, for his forgiveness and com-
 passion. The prevalence of compassionate dispo-
 sitions, and merciful conduct, is very frequently
 enjoined in scripture; that, since our goodness
 cannot reach unto God, it may reach to the saints
 who are on the earth, and to the excellent in whom
 is all his delight; and, thereby, manifest us to be
 the children of our Father who is in Heaven.

This subject convicts of heinous guilt, those,
 who instead of attending to the distresses of others,
 pass them over in neglect, and even take every ad-
 vantage against them, raising the value of the ne-
 cessaries of life, in such a manner, as to "grind
 "the face of the poor," and to reduce them to
 the utmost straits. Such inconsiderate and op-
 pressive conduct, is a direct attempt against the
 honor of God; who assures us, "he that oppres-
 "seth the poor, reproacheth his Maker;" and it
 cannot fail to bring men into the same dreadful
 circumstances with the rich man, in the parable,
 whose doom we are afterwards to consider.

We may also learn from what is before us, not
 to be discouraged when our circumstances are
 straitened and afflictive.

There is a difference, indeed, to be made for
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the manner in which the individual came into such rich circumstances. If it be through sloth and extravagance, then it becomes him immediately to accustom himself to diligence and frugality. It is a law of the gospel, as well as of nature and of so man's ciety, "if any will not work, neither shall he eat." And Christians are strictly commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ, that with "quietness they work and eat their own bread." But if poverty and distress come upon men through affliction, or through unforeseen and unavoidable misfortune, then they ought to accommodate their minds to their circumstances, modestly discovering their wants unto those who are able to supply them, and resigning themselves to that God who hath given them their respective allotment, and interests himself so much in them, that charity bestowed upon them is declared to be a loan unto the Lord, which he engages to repay. It is becoming in every character, to learn, with the Apostle, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content, that our experience, in the issue, may be the same with his. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: Every where, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need."

That you may be encouraged to improve the blessings of Providence when you possess them, and may become patient and submissive when they are withheld, you are made acquainted with the consequences, in a future world, of pursuing either this or an opposite conduct. You have seen the

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rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, you have seen him fare sumptuously every day; you have also seen Lazarus worn out with sickness, lying, in great neglect, almost famished at the rich man's gate. Let the compassionate, who feel for the miseries of this poor beggar, return next Lord's day, you shall see the scene changed, when the advantage is decisively on Lazarus's side.

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S E R M O N V.

The rich Man and Lazarus in a separate State.

LUKE xvi. 25.

"But Abraham said, son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

[The second sermon on this text.]

IN a former discourse from these words, I observed, that the parable, of which my text makes a part, places the rich man and Lazarus in two very different lights. In the one, we view their respective circumstances when on earth; in the other, we follow them in their different allotments in a separate state.

Having already attended to their respective circumstances when on earth, we now extend our view, that we may behold them in their different allotments, in a separate state.

The rich man and Lazarus both die. This is the common lot of the rich, and of the poor; of the righteous, and of the wicked; of the healthy, and of the infirm. "One dieth in his full strength, "being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are "full of milk, and his bones are moistened with "marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness "of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They "shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall

"shall cover them." Death neither spares the rich man for his riches, nor yet the poor man for his poverty; the righteous are no more exempted from his power than the wicked; the healthy and the infirm, whenever the commission is given, are equally seized as a lawful prey. The rich are snatched away from their riches, and the poor from their poverty: The righteous are hastened to their reward, but the wicked are hurried to their punishment: The healthy find it to be an uncertain stay on which they rested, and the infirm, that their apprehensions were too well-founded:

Lazarus, worn out with sickness, with poverty, with neglect, died before his wealthy neighbour, and found a shelter in the grave, where "the weary be at rest." But the rich man continued to flourish, for some time longer, in all the grandeur and pomp of high life, and then came his turn also to leave the world.

The rich man's "good things," and Lazarus's "evil things," follow them for a little, even after their connection with a present world was at an end; for it is said of the rich man that he was "buried," but no such intimation is given concerning Lazarus.

These were circumstances, from which they themselves could neither receive advantage or disadvantage. Their memory, however, was hereby affected: And the grandeur and magnificence, in which the one had appeared for such a number of years, were a little longer displayed; whilst meanness and neglect, continue to overwhelm the

the other. The interment of this poor man was, in all likelihood, attended neither with show nor with solemnity; his body already corrupted, whilst he was yet alive, through an obstinate and loathsome disease, was possibly put out of the way, in the first convenience which could be found; nay, it is well, if it were not left exposed in some lonely corner, as a meal, for these very dogs, who lately "licked his sores." But the rich man had a pompous funeral. He lay for some time in state. He was attended to his grave by a long train of mourners. He had, as was common at that time, his generous way of living celebrated in a solemn oration. He was distinguished by the marble rising eminent above his tomb, pointing out to the passenger, where the great and the noble had been laid.

Death is so humbling to human nature, that men, whenever it is in their power, endeavour to draw a veil over it in the ceremony, and shew, with which their funerals are attended. But ceremony and shew ill become these occasions; so far, at least, as they have a tendency to withdraw the attention of the surrounding multitude, from such thoughts, as ought now to arise and to be cherished. This, if any, is certainly the season for recollection and solemnity: When we ought to be humble and contrite, and to take up a determined resolution, to serve God more faithfully, for time to come, that we also may be ready for our latter end.

The parable, under consideration, encourages

a serious and prudent concern; presenting to our view, a separate state of rewards and punishments.

The rich man and Lazarus had left their respective stations in this world, and were no more known, in the circle of their friends and acquaintances. They exist, however, in another world, where rich possessions, where gaudy dress, where sumptuous fare, have no value; but where the rich and the poor, the noble and the ignoble, the happy and the miserable, stand on an equal footing, and are distributed according to their former characters, to circumstances, which bear more evident marks of distinction, than the circumstances in which any are found, whilst on earth. The rich man who had formerly been neglectful of God, and unconcerned for the miseries of his distressed neighbour, comes off, in this final distribution of circumstances, with inexpressible loss, as an unprofitable servant, into utter ruin. But Lazarus, whose modest disposition and humble carriage, whose submission to God, and regard for fellow-men, had once been so remarkable, finds that his faith and patience were not in vain, as he enters upon the full possession of the promise. Many steps of Providence, which at present appear mysterious, shall at last shine forth in their native beauty, before angels and men, when all the servants of God shall receive the highest honors, but when his enemies shall be overwhelmed with everlasting contempt.

In this distribution, which is afterwards to take place, wherein the respective characters of men shall

shall be fully ascertained, by the honor and disgrace which immediately follow them, Lazarus is said to be "comforted."

Immediately after his death, we hear of Lazarus in another world: He is active and healthy: He is honored and caressed: He is placed in the midst of joys which are full and lasting. All this and much more than either tongue can express, or even heart can conceive, is intimated, when the parable represents him, as "carried by the Angel" "into Abraham's bosom."

The Jews were wont to speak of the blessed after death; sometimes, as having gone to the garden of Eden, and sometimes, as in my text, as having been received into Abraham's bosom. Our Saviour frequently adopts the same expressions.

He comforts his fellow-sufferer, with the encouraging assurance, "verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise; experiencing such a state of happiness and purity, as equals and exceeds what was experienced, whilst man continued in innocence. And, in admiration of the Centurion's faith, he informs the attending multitude, "I say unto you, that many "shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven." In this last allusion, the happiness of Heaven is represented by a feast, where patriarchs and prophets, where apostles and evangelists, where saints of every age, and of every name, meet together, and are regaled with the highest delights. Abraham is mentioned, because

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he is the father of the faithful. Being in his bosom is specified, agreeably to the reclining posture, in which the ancients placed themselves at their meals. This allusion is happily used in the parable, to express the refreshment, which Lazarus received, after the sorrows and fatigues of life, to which he is welcomed by all the heavenly host, and particularly by those, who, like him, had once been distinguished for their faith and patience.

Angels carried Lazarus to his happy mansion. They have it in charge, to bear the saints in their hands, that they may receive no harm, in their journeyings to and fro, during their abode on earth. In consequence of that charge, they often minister unto them, and do them many friendly offices. The cloud, which hangs thick on the world of spirits, renders us less sensible of their services, which shall fully be discovered, as that cloud is removed. They received the soul of Lazarus, when disentangled from the body, and continue to receive the soul of every saint, when, in like circumstances, into their particular charge; conveying them in triumph before God, in whose "presence is fulness of joy," and at whose "right hand are pleasures for evermore."

Lazarus lately appeared in very miserable circumstances. He was worn out with sickness. He was covered with rags. He lay, in great neglect, almost famished, at the gate of a wealthy neighbour. But now "he is comforted," in the removal of every afflictive circumstance, and in receiving the highest happiness which heart can desire. He

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appears in the bloom and vigour of unfading youth. He is clothed with robes of life and immortality. He is honored with a guard of celestial spirits. He is continually feasted with the fruits of paradise. The glory of the rich man, arrayed in his robes of state, or shining amidst the gayest entertainment, makes no greater appearance, before the glory now conferred on Lazarus, and the delights, in which he triumphs, than a taper, when it is darkened by the sun shining in his strength.

Although Lazarus, in the equal distribution, which takes place in the future world, meets with the highest honors and satisfaction, yet the rich man groans under a dreadful reverse of circumstances, being "tormented in this flame."

The particulars of his history, which are very alarming, deserve our serious attention. He finds himself existing in a separate state, as well as Lazarus; but he awakes in confusion and despair, encompassed with devouring flames, and tormented with everlasting burnings.

There are some particulars in his situation, which are very observable.

The first circumstance which we take notice of, is the correspondence between the punishment and the crime. In the days of his flesh, he had indulged his taste, and his pleasure, to the neglect of the hungry and the afflicted. He, also, in all likelihood, had often joined in the song of the drunkard, and revellings of the wanton; committing "ungodly deeds," and uttering "hard speeches," to the

the dishonor of God, and in contempt of his saints. The tongue, therefore, which is the organ of taste, as well as of speech, is particularly instanced, as tormented in an excessive degree. It was formerly employed as the instrument of wickedness, now it is the occasion of extreme distress. It renews the remembrance of his sensuality, and profaneness, and encreases proportionably, his oppression and despair. It is an expressive circumstance, when he is said to have "cried unto" Abraham. His voice had lately been loud in the licentious conversation, and wanton song : Now he "howls for vexation "of spirit," and laments over past conduct, with desperate execrations, and dreadful shrieks.

Something like this is frequently observed, even at present, in the conduct of Providence. Man's "own wickedness" often "corrects him," and his "backsliding reproves him." The punishment is, sometimes, the immediate consequence of his crime ; at other times, it bears an exact proportion to it. The sensualist and voluptuary have themselves often to blame, for the various infirmities and intolerable afflictions with which they are overwhelmed. The insolent and overbearing are frequently in a change of circumstances, treated with the same disdain and contempt, with which they have been accustomed to treat others. The punishment of the wicked, in the future world, shall be greatly aggravated in both these respects. It shall appear to be the immediate consequence of their sins ; and shall bear such strong marks of of them, that their remembrance shall ever be fresh in their minds, and intolerably oppressive. The

The wicked, in another world, shall be acquainted with the happiness of the saints, particularly of those, of whom they were once so neglectful, which shall certainly be found a better ingredient in their cup of woe. They are said in scripture, to be "tormented in the presence of the lamb." The servants of God are represented as looking upon these transgressors, there, "where the worm shall not die, and where the fire shall not be quenched." And the parable, of which my text is a part, supposes the rich man to know Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and to enter into such discourse as would probably arise in these circumstances. An interview between the rich man and Abraham, is introduced to enliven the description, and to make us the more sensible, by a freedom, allowable in parabolical representations, of the anguish with which the wicked shall be affected, when they discover the blessedness of others, from which they themselves are for ever excluded.

The rich man's connexion with Abraham, gave him, once, very great advantages. To Abraham's descendants pertained "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the Father's, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all God, blessed for ever." The rich man, as an Israelite, for the reasons just now mentioned, had a fairer opportunity, than any among the Gentiles, of making his peace with God. He slighted,

d, however, this valuable privilege, and finds his conduct in doing so, to be productive of consequences, peculiarly bitter and intolerable.

The rich man's surprize must have been very great, at his espying Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. This circumstance is introduced with great address in the parable. It shews, that the hungry, whom the wicked have had it in their power to feed; the thirsty, whose thirst they might have quenched; the stranger, whom they ought to have received into their house; the naked, whom they did not clothe; the sick and the oppressed, whom they neither visited nor relieved, shall ever be before them, as so many vultures, to prey upon their peace, because of their former hard-heartedness and neglect. This shall particularly be the case with those, whose cruelty and oppression have, at times, prevailed in an uncommon degree. The conscience of Cain shall feel new horrors, at the view of Abel, whose blood calls aloud for heavy vengeance. Herod shall experience the hottest hell, burning in his breast, when he casts his eye on these infants of Bethlehem, whom, innocent as they were, he barbarously destroyed. Judas shall be racked with inexpressible despair, at the presence of his Divine Master, whom he betrayed to his enemies, for an inconsiderable hire. And as the rich man in the parable, beholds the happiness of Lazarus, the flame shall rage with seven-fold fierceness, and his heavy chain sink him deeper in despair. In these instances, the sinner shall justify God, even in his own condemnation, who gives him
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him "judgment without mercy," who "shewed
"no mercy."

The punishment of the wicked shall be encreased, in the future world, beyond any thing known on earth, by this circumstance, that it can neither be alleviated, nor brought to an end. "A drop
"of water" could not be allowed the rich man
"to cool his tongue," nor was Lazarus at liberty to do him the smallest office of kindness. His
"good things" have all been enjoyed, and only remain in the remembrance, to aggravate his affliction, and give his torment the keener edge. To complete his wretchedness and despair, "a great
"gulph" separates him for ever from the righteous, preventing the least communication between them, and forbidding him to taste of their comforts, or intermeddle with their joys. The wicked, at their respective deaths, find themselves in hell, in such terrible circumstances, "reserved, like the angels
"which kept not their first estate, in everlasting
"chains under darkness, unto the judgment of
"the great day." At this important day, they shall be condemned "to everlasting destruction
"from the presence of the Lord, and from the
"glory of his power," without a possibility of receiving, during eternity itself, a remedy, in alleviation, or an end to such intolerable circumstances.

That part of the parable which has now been before us, teaches us, first, not to blame the present distributions of Providence, nor to pronounce them unequal.

We are not, at present, proper judges of the

distributions of Providence, since our circumstances
hilst on earth, only allow us to see one part of
the design, which receives all its beauty and per-
fection, from the connexion of the whole. When,
for instance, some who fear God, and make con-
science of their duty, groan under necessity and
distress, nay, when even their religious characters
subject them to contempt, and mark them out for
the derision of others; when, on the other hand,
the wicked flourish, and are spoken of with re-
spect, as persons who know the world, and are wor-
thy of its esteem—we, in such a view of things,
are ready to conclude, that God has forsaken the
earth, and thereby made it vain for us to serve him.
A thought, of this nature, once oppressed the
psalmist. He viewed it in every light, and could
not be satisfied. He was long in suspense, and
could form no certain conclusion: "Until, says
he, "I went into the sanctuary of God: Then un-
derstood I their end. Surely thou didst set
them in slippery places: Thou castedst them
down into destruction. How are they brought
into desolation, as in a moment! They are ut-
terly consumed with terrors. As a dream when
one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest,
thou shalt despise their image." A considera-
tion of the same nature is proposed in my text,
to pacify the minds of Christians, when disturbed
by the present appearance of things, where such
discovery is made, as may satisfy them, that in
the issue "it shall be well with the righteous;
for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." But

woe

“ woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him
 “ for the reward of his hands shall be given him

We may also learn from the doctrine before us, secondly, to expect to find ourselves existing in another, when our connection with this world is at an end, and receiving rewards or punishments according to our respective characters and conduct during life.

Our prospects, at present, are confined within the narrow limits of three score years and ten. We cannot promise ourselves even this number of years. A great proportion of mankind is cut off before the number amounts near so high. The present moment alone is ours. The past is once in our power, but now it is gone ; and the future may never be given us. But the world, which we hasten, and from which nothing separates us but an uncertain life, affords us an existence, which endures for ever ; so that if we are happy or miserable, we shall, by an unalterable decree, continue to be so, without the possibility of finding any one circumstance which has the least tendency to impair our happiness, or to lessen our misery.

What reason is there then, my brethren, to moderate our attachments to this world, and to the things thereof. Let us resolutely confess ourselves, as we really are, pilgrims and strangers here on earth. Let us “ desire a better country, that is, an heavenly ;” and be ambitious after a name, and place in that “ city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This is a necessary

fary and a pressing duty. It may be considered as our life; being immediately connected with our present, and particularly, with our future happiness. For those who remember God in the days of their flesh, who improve the riches of his grace, and comply with every part of his known will, shall be remembered by him in a separate state, shall then enjoy fuller evidences of his favour, and be prepared to fulfil all his pleasure, without weariness or imperfection. But whoever lives forgetful of him on earth; whoever neglects his grace, and is inattentive to his service, during the accepted time, and the day of salvation, shall assuredly be forgotten by him afterwards, and held in the utmost contempt; shall be entirely deprived of his favour, and rendered for ever incapable of engaging in that service, in which the highest blessedness of the angelic, and human natures, is known to consist.

If any argument can encourage the diligence of Christians, it must be the one which is now before us. The same argument also, is well suited to rouse the sinner from his insensibility, that he may make a wise choice ere it be too late. Now the door of mercy is open, and the time for improvement is in your hand; but that door shall soon be shut, that time shall instantly pass over, unless you immediately take the advantage of so inestimable a privilege.

Let me therefore conclude, wishing, from my inmost soul, that the same happy conduct, which Moses desired, might distinguish the Israelites, may distinguish you—"O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" J. S F R-

S E R M O N VI.

Communicating the Duty of every Christian;

LUKE xxii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

THE Son of God was pleased to appear on earth, "in the likeness of men." He was encompassed, for many years, with the infirmities incident to humanity in its present state. The labours he underwent were various and of long continuance. Towards the conclusion of life, the struggle was peculiarly severe. Threatened with treachery from friends, and insults from foes, with agony in his soul, and extreme distress in his body, with the terrors of death, and the confinement of the grave, he, calling his disciples together, and distributing among them bread and wine, which he had blessed, enjoined the same action frequently to be repeated by all his followers, until the end of time: "This do in remembrance of me."

I shall, through divine assistance, consider these words, as the last command of a departing Friend, of a common Deliverer—of a dying Father—and of the universal Sovereign. In all which views, it is important and authoritative; it is well suited to reach the heart, and to regulate the conduct.

I begin with considering the words before us, as the last command of a departing friend.

The qualities of a true friend are distinctly marked in scripture, and many instances of the

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sincerest friendship given. A friend "loveth at
 "all times," whether we rise or fall in the world,
 and "sticketh closer than a brother;" being inva-
 riable in his offices of kindness, when other con-
 solations have their ebb and flow: His "wounds,"
 or sharpest reproofs are "faithful," answering
 some valuable purpose: His counsel is pleasing,
 like precious ointment," or costly "perfume:"
 His very presence refreshes and invigorates the
 mind, as "iron sharpeneth iron."

In Ruth's behaviour we may trace the genuine
 workings of friendship. She was not only respectful
 to Naomi, when her son, Ruth's husband, was
 alive, but the same respect continued when her
 husband was dead; and Naomi was resolved to
 return from the land of Moab, where she sojourn-
 ed to her native country. Ruth could not find in
 her heart to part with one for whom she had so
 much deference and regard. A fondness for the
 place of her birth, for the companions of her youth,
 and for all her near relations, which others find to
 be very strong, is overlooked, on her affection for
 this stranger. She determines to cleave to her
 in her painful, as she had done in her happy days:
 "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from
 "following after thee: For whither thou goest,
 "I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
 "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God,
 "my God: Where thou diest, I will die, and
 "there will I be buried."

The loves of David and Jonathan are well known.
 Their situation might have rather been suspected
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to produce jealousy and dislike. The one was in distress and the other at ease. The one was persecuted as a pretender to the crown of Saul, the other was the lawful heir. The union of hearts, in circumstances so adverse to friendship, is the more remarkable, particularly as it could not be broken, but was ever discovering itself in such expressions of love as were "wonderful, passing the love of women." But what are these instances of friendship, or what is any instance in the historian's page, or poet's fable, when compared with the friendship of the Son of God for the children of men? No more than the light of the moon, or of the stars which is obscured by the rising sun, and lost in his superior lustre. There was nothing in any, or all of mankind to draw the attention of Jesus. He beheld us in arms against the will of our Creator, and knew the extent of our misery. He was moved with compassion, and stooped that we might rise. He took the human into union with the Divine Nature. As a man, he endured poverty and distress, labour and vigilance, ignominy and death. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." An atonement is hereby made for sin; an example of patience both in suffering and doing the will of God is given, and a lively hope raised of an entire deliverance, in a short time, from every degree of depravity and evil. The same love which brought our Saviour upon earth,

earth, and influenced him in all his actions, still appears, whilst he makes intercession for transgressors; governing men in mercy, and constantly refreshing his churches with his grace and spirit.

Are you capable of gratitude, O man, and insensible to its workings on this occasion? Would you be willing to treat an earthly friend, as you treat your Friend in Heaven. Had a man like yourself, shewn you hospitality; had he prevented your affairs from ruin; had he snatched you from an opening grave, would you have accounted anything a trouble which preserved the memory of such kindness? and why will you not renew in your minds, by an easy service, your obligations to your Saviour? you can neither be ignorant of what he hath done, nor insensible how much you are interested. Can the humility, and labours, and death of the Son of man, for our advantage, be an indifferent object to any, but to those who possess a depraved and cold heart?

Had he required the best of your flocks, or some costly offering, it were your duty to give it; and is it possible that he should appoint a little bread to be eaten and wine to be drunk, in remembrance of him, by a company of Christians; and yet this easy, this delightful appointment, be generally neglected! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon," lest the enemies of religion rejoice, lest infidels triumph.

The words of my text may be considered as the last command of a common deliverer, as well as of a departing friend.

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Many deliverances have been celebrated in the world in different ways. Israel's escape from Pharaoh's tyranny, gave rise to the passover, an annual festival, when the memorable transactions, in which Moses bears so considerable a figure, became the joy and admiration of all the tribes. Joshua's glorious conquest of Canaan was perpetuated by the monument raised at Gilgal, the public records of the nation, and many religious rites. The services of Deborah and Barak, for their country became famous in verse. Heroes in later days, when Judah became a kingdom, raised monuments in the hearts of a grateful people, and employed the joyful voices of the young and the old. "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Every nation has interesting events, and anniversaries on which they are celebrated--- wars and conquests, heroes and monuments. The advantage in these instances, is limited in its extent, and temporary in its nature. It only concerns a particular people, and the privilege which it secures, is the gift of a few days, which passeth away. But in Jesus, all nations are concerned. The world, by disobedience, was become a dreary, desolate abode; he is the stream, which refreshes all the ends of the earth, in every period of time. Sin and death, misery and destruction, had prevailed over all the tribes of mankind, and rendered their situation desperate. Jesus overcame principalities and powers; "he divided a portion with the great, he divided the spoil with the strong." As our Moses, he breaks the oppressive yoke,

oke, and conducts our wandering steps. As our Joshua, he seizes the promised land in our name, and removes our enemies. As our David, he raises the kingdom which he has formed to great glory, and establishes it on a sure foundation. The advantage, which we receive from others, when compared with the advantage which we receive from Jesus, is no more than the small dust in the balance, or the drop in the bucket. And what would we think of the man who refuses to take a part, on a day of public rejoicing? we would call him a disaffected person, who deserves none of the advantages of society, or blessings of Providence. But what shall we think of him, who will not, on the stated return of solemn occasions, eat bread and drink wine, to commemorate what Jesus hath done for the sons of men? His crime is the basest ingratitude, and thereby he forfeits every advantage which ariseth from the obedience of Jesus unto death.

Say not that you are sensible of your happiness in other respects; blush at the return of days of festivity and joy: Your hearts are hardened against your great deliverer: The table where his triumphant death is celebrated, is almost generally forsaken. The stones are ready to cry out against you: These seats and these walls are evidences of your guilt. We know that angels are present in worshipping assemblies: How astonished must they be, how indignant, to observe multitudes who bear the name of Christ, stand off as unconcerned spectators, whilst the memorial of his loves, passes only through

through the hands of a few ! Jesus himself is present, and resents your behaviour : Notwithstanding his gracious nature, and great love for mankind, he is ready to meet the incorrigible sinner who will not obey his last request, as the lion of the tribe of Judah tearing him in pieces, when there is none to deliver.

The words of my text may be considered as the command of a dying father, as well as of a friend and common deliverer.

The relation of a father gives an equal claim upon affection and obedience. The son who fails in either, behaves so unnaturally, that he falls under the heaviest reproaches. The Jewish law condemned him to death. By every community, he is considered with contempt. If a parent's person and authority be always the object of deference and respect, they are peculiarly so in his last appearance in that capacity. Had the sons of Israel neglected to bury him, according to his last and strict injunction, in the cave, that is, in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, or the descendants of Joseph to comply with his request when he was dying, with respect to carrying his bones with them into the promised inheritance, their name should have been handed down, branded with ignominy to all generations. Jesus, in the highest respect, is the Father of mankind. We are taught to consider him as at once the author of existence and the source of happiness. The characters which he sustains, justly entitle him to our highest affection, and most exact

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obedience. No parent has such a claim upon his children. From him proceedeth health and relatives, life and substance. All his commands ought to be obeyed with the utmost precision; but his dying command has peculiar weight. Were it some great matter which he required of his family, were it to resign life and liberty, substance and friends, it became them to comply. But he only requires an easy service, in which they may engage with convenience and comfort. There can therefore be no excuse for disobedience; it breaks the orders of the household to which you pretend to belong. It throws contempt on your father's authority: It tends to root out this his family from the earth. The person who neglects this ordinance, does what he can, that the name of Jesus may be forgotten, and his authority despised. He is on the side of Caiaphas and Annas, of Herod and Pilate: With the Jewish rabble and Roman guard, he does him despite, to whom he owes the highest reverence. A child in arms against his father, a lower member of a family against a higher, is not such a monster in nature. Let a parent suppose his authority to be disregarded by those who are under him, and let him conceive what would be his feeling: He surely could have no patience; the behaviour is intolerable; and why should you provoke your heavenly Father, by conduct which you would not endure in your inferior? Doth he not see, or doth he not understand? Yes, your conduct is known, and is highly resented: Persevering in it, you shall certainly be cast

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out of the family of Christ, and never be allowed to take your portion among his children. "Who-
 "soever is ashamed of him and his words, of him
 "shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall
 "come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and
 "of the Holy Angels."

The words of my text may be considered as the command of an universal sovereign, as well as of a departing friend, a common deliverer, or a dying father.

A sense of subordination seems to be natural to man. We are so dependent on our parents, that submission to them is among the first lessons which we learn in life. As we advance to manhood, we give our superiors in age, ability or power that respect, and obedience, which we were wont to give our parents. This principle is deeply rooted in human nature, and is of the greatest use: Without it we should live like the beasts of the forest, in a state of anarchy and war. Its influence was easily discovered. The parent, in the first ages of the world, was at once the king and priest of his family; among this little circle, the power of life and death, of punishment, and reward was in his hand. An enterprising person, whose activity and counsel were generally beneficial; acquired over all to whom he was useful, the same authority which parents had in their respective families. It was thus that Nimrod established his dominion. In the same manner, governments originally arose. As they are founded in the common interest of mankind, they were accounted sacred. Like every

circumstance which promotes our happiness, they originate from God. He who refuses submission, rebels against a law of his nature : He is the author of confusion : He resists his Creator's will. If such be the consequence of opposing an authority, limited within a very narrow sphere, what must it be to disobey him who sways his sceptre over angels and men ? For the Lord Jesus holds in his hands the reins of universal government : " All power is given unto him in Heaven and in earth." " God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." He is on the right hand of the Majesty on high, " far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." The same authority, therefore, which has said, " honor thy father and thy mother," has also said, " do this in remembrance of me." " Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all ;" condemning by this one act of disobedience, that authority which renders the whole binding, as certainly as if every particular precept were broken. He who said, " do not commit adultery, said also, " forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," particularly for that service in which the death

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of Christ is remembered. Now, if you commit no adultery, yet if you forsake the house of God, and withdraw from his table, thou art become a transgressor of the law. Can you bear the thought, or abide by the consequences of this? Have you never read that awful passage in the epistle to the Thessalonians, or considered that it directs all its terrors against you? "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

In disobeying Jesus, you rebel against the law of your nature. The principle of submission, which is found to be of such use in common life, is suppressed and kept under, where its influence ought chiefly to prevail. You cherish it in your domestics and children, but will not follow its dictate, when it leads to the noblest and most pleasant act of which the mind is capable. It is because the Saviour has the compassion of God that you are not consumed. He might punish your disobedience, by destroying in your fellow-creatures, the principle of submission, and letting loose among you, the lawless and oppressive; continue to provoke him no longer; you know not the power of his wrath, but are assured that you shall perish, if it be kindled but a little.

The endearments of friendship, the returns of gratitude for a great deliverance, filial reverence, and

and necessary submission, press equally upon you, and call aloud for your compliance with the duty required in my text—"this do in remembrance of me." I cannot see how you can reasonably avoid it. Perhaps you may say you are not prepared—not prepared! for what? To be refreshed with the friendship of Jesus, and grateful for his kindness? to claim your place in his family, and submit to his authority? your heart then must be cold and degenerate indeed. You are in a state of enmity with God, and open to the heaviest curses of his word; and can you look upon such a state with indifference, and be in earnest, when you tell us with your usual coolness, that you are unprepared? You think, perhaps, of this service some time hence: Futurity is not yours: *Now* is the accepted time: To-day the season of salvation: Afterwards you may have neither inclination nor opportunity for engaging in the peculiar services of religion. I am afraid, with respect to a great proportion, that you care for none of these things. What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? is your chief concern. This is a dangerous disposition; It makes God your enemy: It degrades your nature: It threatens you with utter ruin. To awake in you a devout and noble ambition, you are invited to the table of the Lord. Every one of you is addressed in particular. It is your friend and deliverer, whom you hear: It is the master of the family, giving regulations to his household. It is the Sovereign of Heaven, promulgating his law: "This do in remembrance of me." Amen.

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S E R M O N VII.

Universal Benevolence recommended.

LUKE x. 37.

"Then said Jesus unto him, go, and do thou likewise."

TH E S E words are the conclusion of a parable, wherein our Lord teaches us to consider mankind as neighbours, and to give those who stand in need, wherever we may find them, all the assistance in our power. Having drawn a character in the parable, where this generous consideration is seen to be the principle of action, he proposes the character in view as an universal model, "Go, and do thou likewise."

In discoursing from these words, I shall, through divine assistance, I. explain the parable with which they are connected; and II. illustrate the conduct which they require.

The scene of the parable which I am now to explain, is laid between Jerusalem and Jericho. The places were about seven leagues distant from one another. The road led through a wild desert. Dreary and dangerous from its natural situation, it became much more so, from the troops of robbers which it sheltered. Their depredations were so frequent, and attended with such cruel circumstances, that this their harbour was called "the valley of bloody men." Jericho was a city, inhabited by persons of the sacred order. It is said by

by the Jewish writes to have contained twelve thousand priests and Levites. Their office brought them frequently to Jerusalem. These circumstances, give the parable great probability, and shew how naturally the different characters in it are introduced.

An object of distress presents itself first to our view. Necessary business brought "a certain" Jew on the road which leads down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He had the unhappiness to "fall among" some of these "thieves," who were the terror of travellers. They might either have been a band of Arabians, who subsisted by rapine, or some countrymen, who had abandoned themselves to the high-way, or perhaps stragglers from the Roman army, who, notwithstanding very strict discipline, were much addicted to plunder. Whoever they were, they treat our poor traveller with great barbarity. They "stripped him of his raiment," with whatever else they found valuable about him; and lest he should give others the alarm, and occasion a pursuit, they "wound him" in a very cruel and dangerous manner, and leave him so incapacitated to give them any disturbance, that he seemed to be breathing his last.

Whilst he lay wallowing in his blood, "a certain priest," who, in all likelihood was returning from the services of the temple, "went down, this way," to his abode at Jericho. The servant of that God who delights in mercy, ought to have discovered bowels of compassion for the afflicted. The devotions, in which he had been engaged, tended

ded to soften the heart. But, alas! the sacred fire, before which others melt, only hardens him. He beheld a fellow-creature in great distress—he beheld, but turned away coolly from the sight. A particular enquiry might have drawn him into trouble and expence. He, therefore, crosses the road, and proceeds deliberately on his journey. The same example was in like manner, followed by a Levite; who, being on the road, when he was at the place, came, and looked on the miserable object, and then crossed, and passed by, without affording the least relief. Are these the descendants of the hospitable Abraham? These his servants, “whose compassions fail not?” How are ye fallen, ye sons of the morning! how unlike the men who were wont to be the admiration of the nations; an example to the inhabitants of the earth.

If this distressed object was slighted by those from whom relief might have been expected, the eye of a stranger shewed pity, his hand brought help. For his countrymen, our misfortunate traveller might have lain and perished. But “a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was:” But who were the Samaritans? as a nation, they were the enemies of the Jews. Many causes occasioned a mutual hatred. They were of foreign extract, being placed in Samaria by the king of Babylon, instead of the native Israelites. They early introduced a mixture of superstition and idolatry into their religion. They treated the Jews, when weakened by captivity, in a very injurious

in a furious manner. They built a temple on one of their mounts, as the centre of their worship, in opposition to that at Jerusalem. The infamous offer, in particular, which they made Antiochus, of admitting his idolatrous rites and worship, at a time when their neighbours suffered every thing in defence of their religion, contributed exceedingly to expose them to the contempt and abhorrence of the Jews. The enmity was, on these accounts, so inveterate, that they would receive no act of kindness from one another; and are said to have been exceedingly solicitous, if they happened to meet in a narrow way, that they might pass without touching, for fear of pollution on each side. But this Samaritan, forgetting their differences in religion and politics, was moved with compassion towards a fellow-creature whom he observed in distress. His humanity was not a lifeless principle. It was not satisfied with deploring the misery which he beheld, and wishing it had been otherwise, but his heart directed his hand. He went to the mangled traveller, and "bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine," according to the manner in which the ancients treated fresh wounds; "and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two-pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

In this conduct, we discover real pity, and much condescension. The Samaritan neither spares trou-

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ble nor expence in relieving his fellow-traveller. He makes use of his own raiment as bandages for his wounds. He refreshes him from his own stores. He procures him lodging at an inn, from the small stock on which he journeyed. Nay, he even becomes engaged to make good to the host, any necessary expence for his distressed guest, until he should be able to proceed to his own home.

The rulers of the Jews, at our Saviour's appearance, considered their neighbours to be those only of their own nation, and their own religion, their friends and their benefactors; but our Saviour combats this notion in the parable before us, and by it extorts from a great Rabbi, the frank confession, that even a Samaritan discharging an office of humanity toward a Jew, acted the part of a true neighbour. "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, he that shewed mercy." (Then follow the words of my text :) "Then said Jesus unto him, go, and do thou likewise." The enmity subsisting between the two nations, appears in this answer. The Samaritan had done a generous and a worthy action, It appeared to be so even to the Jewish ruler. But whilst he commends the action, he would willingly conceal the actor. He says not the Samaritan was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves. From those who bore that hated name, he neither desired nor expected to hear of any good. The force of truth only prevailed to draw from him this confession—that it was he was his neighbour, who had shewn him mercy.

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Having now explained the parable with which the words of my text are connected, I go on to illustrate the conduct which they require.

Here I observe that we must consider with a friendly regard, as our neighbours, all who partake of the same nature, and do them every good office in our power. No difference of nation or religion, no quarrel or resentment, no enmity or alienation of mind, however produced, ought to affect this principle, or exclude any who may stand in need from our help. The universal good-will, which the gospel cherishes, is not merely a specious theory. It is not a fine-spun cobweb which any weight will destroy. It enters into the very essence of Christianity, and invigorates it as much as the nervous system invigorates the body. It takes a pleasure in beneficent conduct, and thinks nothing of inconvenience and trouble. "Mercy," on such occasions, "is" accounted to be "better than sacrifice." The Jewish priest and levite, were no doubt ingenuous enough to palliate their inhumane behaviour with plausible excuses; and with their usual formality, to thank God for their own deliverance, whilst they passed by a helpless person, unassisted in the jaws of death. However they managed the matter with their own minds, our Saviour in this parable brands the character as infamous. It is the same character of which the Apostle James speaks of as highly blameable: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be you warmed and filled: Not-with-

“withstanding ye give them not those things
 “which are needful to the body; what doth it
 “profit?”

In order to comply with the instruction which our Saviour gives us in this parable, our charity must be of the most diffusive and effective nature. It must include friends and enemies; countrymen and strangers; those who agree in the same modes of worship, and those who differ from them; those by whom we have been injuriously, as well as kindly used. We must owe no man any thing like ill will, “but to love one another; for he
 “that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law.” This is evidently the sense of the parable before us, and breathes the genuine spirit of the gospel, as is apparent from the precepts which extend this duty to all men—from the manner in which we are required to treat our enemies, and particularly from the example of Jesus Christ. That the gospel requires universal and fervent love, is apparent, from the precepts which extend this duty to all men.

There was something, I confess, in the Jewish dispensation, which greatly favoured a narrow spirit. The Jews were forbidden to form connections with other nations, whom they were taught to consider as unclean. The early marks which they received in their flesh, a peculiar dress, and a distinguishing diet, kept them asunder. Above all, the temple at Jerusalem, being the centre of their religion, to which every male was obliged to repair thrice a year, to perform their worship, made it impossible that Judaism should extend, far beyond
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the boundary of the Holy Land, and was a distinction, very unfavourable to universal charity. This the apostle calls "the middle wall of partition—the enmity" which kept them apart from all the world. Such a dispensation suited the circumstances of the world, when it was instituted, and answered good purposes; but when circumstances altered, and these purposes were fully gained, it gives way to the more generous dispensation of the gospel; that mankind, wherever they dwell, and however they be distinguished, may, according to the mystery of God, revealed to the Holy Apostles, become "fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." Accordingly, the Galatians are required, "let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." That they might approve themselves Christians, their good offices must extend to whomsoever it was in their power to help, and must be persevered in, during life. "We," says the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, "exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." These expressions of kindness, administering reproof, consolation and support, shewing ourselves patient, long-suffering and kind, be-
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long not only to those who are one with us by the ties of blood, of friendship, and of religion, but also to any among the whole of mankind, with whom we may meet, and of whom we may be informed. The Apostle discovers how much he thought such a disposition, and such a conduct, to accord with the gospel, when he prays for the church at Theſſalonica: "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you."

These expressions make it evident enough, that a Christian "knows no man," or set of men, "after the flesh," among whom he confines his regards, and good offices. Mankind in general are his neighbourhood; his help is ready for all whom he may benefit. The testimony of his mind, in this respect, is his joy in the day of trouble: "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me: And I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: My judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor."

The treatment which the gospel requires us to give our enemies, shews the general benevolence which it breathes.

A forgiving disposition, which embraces with a friendly regard, those from whom we received injury, was not the characteristic of the nation

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before the Christian dispensation, nor is it generally recommended in their systems of morality. The Jews themselves, in this respect, were exceedingly defective. There be two nations, says the son of Sarach, which my soul abhorreth; the Samaritans and the Philistines.

Such dispositions, are like dangerous damps, which extinguish love. They are hurricanes, which blast kind offices as they rise. But Christianity is the sun which disperses these damps; it is the voice of Jesus, which, whenever it is heard, the storm ceases, and "there is a great calm." The language of the gospel is, "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." This our Lord required, and this all his servants taught. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: For in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his

“ his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome
 “ evil with good.” Were our neighbours on the
 continent to meet an Algerine in distress, who seized
 their sons and sends them into slavery, how must
 they treat him? Must they avenge the quarrel, and
 add affliction to the afflicted? No, but as Christians
 they are bound to forget their national injuries
 and the differences of religion, and to yield to the
 calls of humanity and compassion. Were any of
 us to have it in our power to be advantageous to
 the man who had injured our name, thrown con-
 tempt upon our family, or some way or other
 shewn himself particularly unfriendly, what steps
 shall we take? Selfish considerations would bind up
 our hands, and harden our heart, but the gospel
 directs us to different conduct, and cherishes con-
 trary dispositions; bringing the matter home, while
 it makes our forgiving others, the condition of our
 being forgiven of God: “ If ye forgive men their
 “ trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive
 “ you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses,
 “ neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”
 The spirit, therefore, of the parable we have been
 explaining, as well as of the whole gospel, tends to
 destroy all the malignant dispositions, and hurtful
 conduct, which do so much mischief in the world,
 and to promote love and beneficence of the most
 fervent and extensive nature.

The example of Jesus confirms all the lessons
 which we find in his parables, or any where in the
 gospel.

This parable may easily apply as an allegory to
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shadow forth his good-will to the children of men. Disobedience had spread grief and ruin among the human race. We lay, like this poor traveller, in our blood, exposed to eternal death. The law of Moses, as the priest and levite, knew no compassion. But Jesus, the good Samaritan, passing over the considerations of our guilt and unworthiness, at infinite labour and distress, procures us mercy, and effects our complete deliverance. Can the heart which feels his love, be hardened against the necessitous, or the debtor to his grace, inhumane? It is impossible. Faith in him must produce a similarity of temper, and inspire and animate conduct, like that for which he was distinguished. None can deserve so little at our hand, as we did at his; but mercy triumphed over vengeance. His doctrines are the transcript of his heart. His life exemplifies his doctrines. All his miraculous works were instances of his goodness, as well as of his power. Whilst they amazed the beholders, they imparted health, or sight, or soundness of mind, to the diseased, the blind, or the lunatic, who came in his way. The circle of his relations and friends did not confine his charity. A peculiar friendship for the beloved disciple, did not swallow it up. Every one was his friend, who obeyed his holy commandments, and whosoever did the will of his Father, the same was to him as "his brother, and sister, and mother." All were welcome to him, whether Samaritan, or Syrophœnician, Jew or Gentile, high or low, and every request which could benefit the individual, was cheer-

fully answered. What was spoken to the praise of Titus Vespasian, the Roman emperor, who, for his goodness, was called the darling of mankind, was really performed by Jesus; for none, who were reasonable in their expectations, ever departed from him with a heavy countenance. The same principle which animated him during life, shone with peculiar lustre at his death. Malchus, the servant of the high priest, was of the detachment who came to seize him. Peter, with a rash hand, directed, however, by an honest zeal, struck at Malchus and smote off his ear. Jesus, who was already bound, with a benevolence peculiar to himself, begged the use of his hand, that he might restore the ear of Malchus by creative touch. But what puts his fervent and unbounded charity, beyond all doubt, is, that he willingly laid down his life for his bitterest enemies, and mingled his prayers with his blood, that his death might not be laid to their charge, but might become even to them the means of eternal life: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

When we consider the generous conduct of the tender-hearted Samaritan; when we attend to the extensive charity which the gospel every where breathes; particularly, when we review the character of Jesus, a voice from Heaven speaks to the heart, and commands, in an authoritative manner, "go, and do thou likewise."

Which may God grant, and to his name be praise. Amen.

S E R-

S E R M O N VIII.

The Parable of the rich Glutton.

LUKE xii. 21.

"S O is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

OUR Lord, in the parable of which my text is the conclusion, silences an unseasonable request, which interrupted him when engaged in a very serious discourse. One of his hearers would have him to decide a dispute, respecting some secular interest. He waves this business, as foreign from his office. But he improves on it, as he did every occurrence, for the instruction of others. He guards them against covetousness, which occasions such contention among men, and shews it, in an apt parable, to be an unsafe and a ruinous principle. He sums up all that he had said on the subject, in the words of my text—"so," such a fool as the parable describes, "is he who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

In discoursing from these words, I propose, through divine assistance, I. to illustrate the character in the text: "He that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." And then, II. to shew how we must estimate such a character; which will lead us to explain the parable intended to expose it.

A leading feature, in the character drawn in my text, appears, when the object of ambition and pursuit is discovered to be "*himself*."

The context throws great light upon this, as well as upon all the other parts of the character under consideration. An individual, among the multitude, who attended our Saviour's ministry, received little advantage from his attendance. The world had the full possession of his heart, which rendered an interesting discourse, on a very solemn subject, entirely ineffectual. The prevailing attachment, like a rapid torrent, bursts through every bound of prudence, and even of decency. He would interest our Saviour in a family quarrel, and through his influence, would prevail upon an elder brother, to allow him a larger share of the inheritance, than was thought to be his right. Our Saviour reproves his conduct, as arising from a covetous disposition. He adds this maxim to his reproof: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." To confirm both, he brings in view a rich man, who blessed his soul in his plentiful crops, and valuable commodities; expecting much satisfaction from an indolent, an intemperate, and a carnal mirth. But, he is suddenly roused from his indolence; is instantly deprived of every thing which could minister to his intemperance; and finds his mirth interrupted, by an immediate summons before an invisible Bar, to answer for such unreasonable and foolish conduct. The same folly attends his conduct, who "layeth up treasure for *himself*," that

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is, for the body, and the world : Who thinks that his happiness consists in sensual gratifications, or acts as if he thought so : Who allows the appetites, which he possesses in common with the beasts, an entire dominion over reason and conscience, whereby we rise in the scale of beings, to a rank, but a little lower than the angels."

It is very dishonorable for human nature, that men, through a gross mistake, should value the body and its respective concerns, far beyond its real importance. The body is by no means the most valuable part of our constitution, nor can it have any just claim to our chief regard. Conduct, founded on such a mistake, introduces confusion into the works of God, and subverts the natural order of things. Apostacy, from God, brought in this, amongst a fatal train of other evils. For, as our nature came from the Creator's hand, the rational and intellectual powers had the full direction of the lower passions and appetites, and an entire sway over them. Under such regulation, they were advantages to men, and reflected honor on Him who implanted them, as active principles in our constitution. But when innocence is gone, appetites and passions refuse the subordination, in which alone they can be serviceable, and overbear all the wiser dictates of reason, and of conscience.

In consequence of such disorder in human nature, which constitutes a striking part of the character before us, present things are followed with an ardour, exactly proportioned to the high estimate

mate which we make of them, as if they were our chief good, and we had no other business on earth, but to make them our own: My text, agreeable to this, describes a person who "layeth up for himself."

He cannot be satisfied with what is absolutely necessary, but is ever reaching after more. "The grave, and the barren womb; the earth, that is not filled with water, and the fire that saith not, it is enough," are not more insatiable than he, in their boundless craving. For it is highly probable, that our Lord's hearer, who applied to him for his influence and authority, in prevailing upon an elder brother, to share with him the inheritance, had a sufficiency to answer all the moderate demands of nature and of decency. Nay, to necessary food and raiment, such conveniences of life, were, in all likelihood, added, as put him not only on a level with many of his neighbours, but also raised him above most of them. Accordingly, in the parable, which is intended for his reproof, the rich man, whilst he had more than he could use, is still stretching beyond his line, and enlarging his stores to receive new commodities, for a supply, during a number of succeeding years.

The circumstances of those men, who make provision for the flesh, and will not be contented with the allotments of Providence, whether they be small or great, are here strongly marked.

Men, in very different ways, may be wholly employed with their present interest. Some employ every thought and every exertion in improving their

their respective businesses, and others, in gratifying their appetites, or giving vent to their passions. This man "rises early, and sits up late," to aggrandize his family; and that man "eats the bread of sorrow" in pursuit of some ambitious view. Here every effort of flattery and deceit are used, to get into the favour of the great; and there, all the winning arts of softness and complaisance are studied, with exactness and care, in order to make a figure in the polite world. In some one or other of these pursuits, men, following after riches, or pleasure, or fame, in a strait and unvarying tract, with earnestness and assiduity, with resolution and zeal, with patience and constancy, fall under the description in my text, of those who "lay up for themselves," or provide for the body only, without allowing a more noble ambition, which embraces future existence, to engage their attention or animate their pursuit.

Success, in our favourite pursuit, is not necessary to include any in the character before us. The character assuredly belongs to him, whose heart is after the world, in one shape or other; and whose most earnest employment is, to secure in it a portion for himself. The general turn of the disposition, and the prevailing bias of the conduct, determine a character as certainly, when we are most unsuccessful, as when the world smiles upon us, and enriches our lot with all its treasures.

The person, characterized in my text, follows after this world, and provides for himself in it, considering the things thereof to be his "treasure."

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Our Saviour lays it down as a certain maxim, that "where the treasure is, there will the heart be also." We conclude, from hence, that whatever engages the heart, in any eminent degree, becomes a treasure to the individual; being valued and pursued after in preference to every thing besides. The character, in my text, is particularly marked, by the high value which is set upon the world, and the constant preference which is given it, to every opposite interest. It is of small importance, what may be the particular earthly object, which engrosses the heart, and animates the conduct: It may be business or pleasure: It may be honor or ambition: It may be the favour of the great, or the smiles of the polite. Perhaps neither, strictly speaking, is the prevailing principle; but it may be any thing else, which only respects the body, and a present life. In either, or all of these cases, men "lay up treasure for themselves," providing only for the flesh, as the highest concern, which they will either know or regard.

It generally happens, that such men have their reward. The man of business enjoys his riches, and the man of pleasure his accursed draught, after which he thirsts so much. Reputation crowns the pursuit of honor, and the object of his pride, the aim of the ambitious. Flattery pleases the great; and usual compliances, the fashionable and the gay. Present pursuits, of every kind, have a reward in reserve, correspondent to their respective natures. Can this reward, in any degree, recompense the pains we take in its attainment? Is it not

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not imperfect and unsatisfying? does it not perish in the using, and leave nothing valuable behind? has it not, in its most flattering appearance, more attractions at a distance, than at a nearer survey? All this is certainly true. We are deceived in our expectations: We are cloyed in our enjoyments: We come short of the happiness we imagined to be within our reach. But if men will choose such a portion, they can reasonably expect nothing but vexation and disappointment. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

The finishing circumstance, in the character drawn in my text, is this, "that he lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

Our Saviour means to intimate, that he is a stranger to acts of charity, which would secure a valuable fund, lodged with our Heavenly Father, and perfectly safe from such calamitous accidents, as imbecility and remove the objects of earthly pursuits and enjoyment.

The members of the church of Smyrna, notwithstanding extreme outward tribulation and poverty, are pronounced to be rich. They derived, from a lively faith in that God, in whose service they were resolutely engaged, present support and consolation. A noble ambition was kindled, which diffused a glow, through all the active powers, by the hope of a great reward, in the future state.

Without much of present things, they have more real satisfaction, than the greatest abundance ever yields. We must, therefore, consider them under every outward disadvantage, to be “the poor of this world, whom God hath chosen, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him.”

The persons, on the other hand, who prosper in the world, and enjoy easy or affluent circumstances, are not rated any higher on this account, in the divine esteem; unless, in gratitude for the overflowing cup, which an indulgent Providence has allotted them, they exert themselves to be extensively useful. The rich, in this world, receive a very strict charge, as they would enjoy the favour of God—“That they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

Men, therefore, rise or fall in the favour of God, and are rich or poor, in his estimate, not according to their allotments in this world, but according to the degree, in which they mind religion, and are serviceable unto all around. The individual, whose aim is so well-directed, in whatever sphere he moves, engages God on his side; and shall, when he leaves the world, as naked and destitute as he entered in, be enriched with the inexhaustible treasure

sure of Heaven. But he who is a stranger to piety and usefulness, who throws away his time in vain or guilty pursuits, who employs what is good in itself, for the service of his appetites and lusts, having hereby lost his interest in God and love for his service, he has no hopes from him in a future world, nor the least capacity nor taste for the employment or happiness of saints beyond the grave.

Our present circumstances are capable of being turned to great advantage, were they wisely improved. Did men, for instance, only seek after wealth and power, to enable them to do good to one another; did their taste of pleasure, open for them, new sources of gratitude, and obedience to him, who has formed them for happiness; did their ambition and their love of praise, lead them to excel in kind dispositions and friendly offices, then they would become useful in their place, and the principles of action would be regulated by their proper object. But where our obligation to serve God, and to promote the welfare of fellow-men, is entirely overlooked, and the world is chosen to gratify low appetites and guilty passions, men "lay up for themselves, and are not rich towards God."

The doctrine now before us may be improved, as the text by which we may try our respective characters, and find out whether God or the world, our future or present interest, the care of the soul or the care of the body, be nearest at heart, and have the most influence upon conduct.

In bringing this trial to an issue, it will be necessary to pay some attention to our particular circumstances

stances and relations in life. One man is poor, and another is rich. One is engaged in active and another in still life. One is happy in the circle of his acquaintances and relatives, and another is unhappy. Although these situations modify the same character very much, yet in either situation, it may, by a little attention, be easily known.

When a poor man, for instance, is ashamed of the poverty he could not prevent, it argues as certainly an earthly disposition as when a rich man keeps up useless treasures, and is lavish of them to little purpose. The one embraces the world in his bosom, but the other would willingly grasp it, were it in his reach. Both are destitute of that faith, which rests, without anxiety, on a watchful Providence, and contemns equally the smiles and the frowns of a vain and of an unconstant world.

He is a worldly man, who allows his attention to be withdrawn from his best concerns, through the multiplicity of business; nor is he less so, who, unknown and unobserved, passes through life, sparing to an excess of what he has; neither enjoying it cheerfully himself, nor sharing it with others.

The man, who, in compliance with their humour with whom he associates, plunges headlong into hurtful pleasure, is, without doubt, strongly characterized in my text. The character also belongs to him, who through a false affection, repines at Providence, which has removed the friend on whom he dotes, and loses the enjoyment of what he really possesses, because things are not altogether to his mind. Both are actuated by a very danger-

ous principle. The one complies with the humour of his acquaintances, and the other yields to affection for his friend, in preference to the known and the express will of God. Both follow courses, which discover them to be united to the earth, and withhold them from the performance of their duty.

Excessive sorrow or excessive joy, arising from the losses or the gains, from the disappointments or the successes, the wants or the supplies, with which a present state is so much diversified, are as undoubted marks of a worldly disposition, as if we were ever so much engaged, in all the pleasures and pursuits of life.

In one word, if any thing short of God and his service, engage the affection and animate the conduct, whether it be riches, or pleasures, or fame, or relatives, or be it any thing else, upon which an immortal spirit can throw away its ambition and desire, it includes us in the character in my text. The discovery ought to give us the alarm. We have been taught more than the beasts of the field, and made wiser than the fowls of Heaven, and yet we act a part only suitable in their sphere. We affront God in abusing the distinction, arising from a rational and an intellectual nature, and sink far below the honorable rank originally intended for man. To follow after the gratifications of sense, and to be amused with the false promises of a vain world, is certainly to give up with all the great advantages, which our circumstances afford, and to incur the utmost ruin and disgrace.

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We can neither attain what is valuable in itself nor rise to eminence of any kind, without much industry and pains. Even the world, although an empty phantom, seldom bestows herself upon the inactive and the slothful. What attention and care, what diligence and exertion, what constancy and perseverance, must the individual discover, who would enjoy the pleasures, who would reap the profits, or shine in the honors with which the world engages the generality of mankind. It is very possible, that after all, the individual may come short of his aim, and even when he attains it, find it unworthy of his labour. Were the same attention and care, the same diligence and exertion, the same constancy and perseverance well directed, it would recompence us in the fullest manner. Habits of evil would hereby be corrected, and virtuous habits established; we would become holy and good and secure "a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man."

Men are, by their industry, ever reaching after happiness or profit. They would come immediately to their end, were they to mind religion as the "one thing needful," and to apply themselves chiefly to attain and to improve it. They would hereby, from the certainty of receiving as much of the world as is absolutely necessary, enjoy present peace and satisfaction; and beside a glorious and lasting reward, being reserved as their portion in the eternal world, would brighten all their future prospects. But to change this order, and to attend to the world, as our chief business, whilst we pur-

off other concerns, as what may be secured at any time, discovers great folly and imprudence; being attended with present care and vexation, and exposing us afterwards to irrecoverable ruin. As this argument, from its importance, deserves to be discussed at large, and as it naturally falls under consideration, when we come to explain the parable, which introduces my text, in which a worldly conduct, in its present and future consequences, is fully exposed, we shall now reserve it, with what remains of the subject, for another discourse.

May God bless his word, and to his name be praise. Amen.

S E R-

S E R M O N IX.

The Parable of the rich Glutton.

LUKE xii. 21.

"S O is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

[The second sermon on this text.]

IN discoursing formerly from these words, I attempted, according to the method then laid down, to illustrate the character in my text; "he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." I took notice, that the person is here described, who attends to present things, as if they were the chief business and care of men on earth. In consequence of such an error, he provides for these, with a diligence, proportioned to the high, but mistaken estimate which he makes of them. He gives them, as his treasure, a constant preference to every thing beside. He neglects, in the pursuit of the world, to serve God, and to be useful to others.

Having proceeded thus far, we are now to shew how we ought to estimate this character, which leads us to explain the parable intended to expose it; for such as is the rich man there spoken of, such is he who "layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

The circumstances of the individual in question were very prosperous.

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"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully."

The case is here stated in the most favourable light, that it may apply the more easily to all cases of the same nature, and have full weight in such application.

This man was "rich" in large tracts of valuable land; which afforded him the conveniences as well as the necessaries of life. Were his inclinations corrupted, through a vicious habit, he had in his reach, the luxuries of the epicure, and the joys of the voluptuous; but were he better inclined, he filled an eminent station of usefulness and authority.

Providence blessed what he had; for his lands were so fruitful, that he was at a loss for room to receive, and stores to accommodate the vast produce of his plentiful crops.

In such circumstances, we shall certainly find him easy and contented: His heart overflowing with gratitude for the indulgence of his Heavenly Father, and his hand open for the relief of all around. In this, our expectation, however reasonable, is sadly disappointed; for we see him selfish and careful.

And "he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?"

He is encumbered with his plenty. He becomes pensive and serious. Through inward reasoning, the peace of his mind is entirely broke. "What shall I do?" Were it a poor man who knew not where to seek the next meal, whose anxiety dictated

such

such passionate language, we should have felt for his extremity, and made it, in part, our own. But what ails this rich man? were his hopes in a promising crop, all blasted? or did he meet with some severe affliction, either in his own person, or in the person of his friends? no such thing had befallen him. All his distress is this; he has more than he knows what to do with, and is at a loss where to bestow his fruits and his goods. No man, at this rate, can ever expect satisfaction. If he be poor, he is fretful and discontented; if rich, his riches encumber and oppress him. A worldly man, even in a middle state between these extremes, is disconcerted, and out of humour when any surmount him.

But to return to my parable: Had this man, whose countenance appears overcast with thought, and his heart full of care, been estimating the true value of worldly things, and laying schemes for the relief of the needy, by the remainder of his fruits, when every personal and family want was supplied, his deliberation had been manly and becoming, and might have been attended with present satisfaction and future advantage. But without one thought of the necessitous and destitute, his only anxiety is to keep together what he has, that for a number of years, he might supply fuel to his lusts, and be enabled to plunge headlong into sensual pleasures.

The issue of his deliberation corresponds exactly with such a disposition of mind.

“And he said, this will I do; I will pull down

“ my

"my barns, and build greater; and there will I
"bestow all my fruits and my goods."

There are delicate traces of a haughty, and an
overbearing spirit in this language. Every word
is expressive of his heart. "My barns, my fruits,
my goods. They were his indeed in respect of
fellow-men, who, without his free consent, had no
right in them; but in respect of God, he was only
a steward, entrusted with barns, and fruits, and
goods, that he might see after the destitute, and
afford them relief. Had this thought once been
admitted, he had certainly become a little more
modest; and the deliberation which now held him
in suspense, had, under a sense of the indulgence
of Providence, been brought to a happy conclu-
sion. But he overlooks the hand, which so richly
supplied him. He might, however, have proce-
ded on maxims of human prudence, and taken the
counsel of some Ahitophel, in his present perplex-
ity. The opinion he had of his own judgment,
as sufficient enough without any assistance, preven-
ted him from taking such a step. "This," as the
wisest course, which in my circumstances can be
followed, "will I do: I will pull down my barns,
"and build greater." A wise course to be sure,
for the ease of his care! Had he racked his
imagination to find out a ready method of involv-
ing himself in fresh incumbrances, he could not
have fixed upon any more proper to answer his
purpose, than to pull down and build up. A
course frugal as it is wise! Were his scheme, as
seems to have been the case, to keep together as
much

much as he could, it would have saved expence to have made additions to old barns, for the present occasion ; but worldly men often act very inconsistently, and are tossed by jarring passions, into opposite extremes.

When his old barns were demolished, and his new ones raised, "there (says he) will I bestow "all my goods." He never recollects that the crops, which this year are so plenteous, as to fill his new buildings, might next year, through a bad harvest, be bestowed in much less room. Such men seldom look forward ; they lay all their plans according to present appearances, and make no acknowledgment of a divine Providence in executing them. He is very positive, I will do so and so. Infatuated man, who took no warning from universal experience, which proclaims aloud the uncertainty of life, and the fluctuating nature of all human affairs. He marks out the path for these merchants, whom afterwards the Apostle warns of their situation, and assures them that they stood on uncertain and dangerous ground. "Go to now, "ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into "such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, "and sell, and get gain : Whereas ye know not "what shall be on the morrow ; for what is your "life ? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye "ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and "do this or that."

Having pulled down, and raised up, according to the contrivances of a luxurious fancy, he then proposes

propose to retire from business, and to be as happy, as corn and wine, shared with his jovial companions, can possibly render him.

“And I will say to my soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry.”

This address to his soul, is well contrived to enable us to make a just estimate of the vanity of the world, and of the folly of those who choose it for their portion. It plainly intimates, that he had little or no present comfort in his abundance. The executing the project of raising commodious buildings, and filling them with his wealth, was a work of time, and created him for the present, much labour and anxiety: Whereas, in fact, there was nothing to prevent him from enjoying himself immediately, had not his mind, like the mind of the ambitious sovereign of Epirus, been after new acquisitions, before he could use with pleasure, what at the time he really possessed.

“Much goods laid up for many years,” gave him a happy prospect, had it been perfectly certain. The wasting moth and the corroding rust, to which all earthly possessions are subject, is entirely overlooked. Nor is there the least allowance for accidental circumstances. He supposes all shall be well to-morrow, because it is so to-day. Has not the daring thief often made his way to stores, as secure as his, and eased them of their encumbrances? Has not the flaming thunder been known to set them on fire, and to consume, in a moment, all the hopes of succeeding years? Do not riches

“certainly

"certainly make themselves wings?" Do "they not fly away as an eagle towards Heaven?"

We shall allow that his barns are finished, and all his goods are safely stored in them; but how could this afford him ease? may not one dead fly spoil a whole pot of precious ointment? may not one thorn make the softest bed uneasy? and shall not one fit of sharp pain and overcoming sickness be as ready to interrupt his present enjoyment and to lessen, for the sad moment, in his esteem the value of all his possessions?

It is a strange resolution to make all his pleasures only subservient to his lusts. Has he indeed no other business on earth, but to take his ease—to eat—to drink—and to be merry? Is it honorable for human nature to allow himself in the gratification of unbridled appetites, and the enjoyment of hurtful pleasures? Is it becoming to pamper the flesh, and to inflame the passions, whilst the service of God and the welfare of fellow-men are equally neglected? Although such conduct degrade our nature, and sink it far below the rank of rational creatures, yet in the thought of such conduct, the man pleases himself, and such conduct alone he proposes to practice.

An address to the soul, on this occasion, promising it satisfaction and contentment from these circumstances, is particularly foolish. For what connection has a barn full of corn and valuable commodities, stored up for a number of years, with the happiness of an immortal spirit? Separated from the body, it can have no relish for sensual enjoyments.

ments. Such happiness is suitable enough to the nature of some of the lower animals; but man, who was made after the image of God, is intended for noble and angelic pleasures.

Every view, therefore, which we can take of the which man's resolution, discovers it to be inconsiderate and absurd in the last degree: Of this, we may be more particularly sensible, when we learn, how he who sits in the Heavens, derided his counsel, and brought it to nought.

"But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" He took no account of God in all his schemes; but God did of him, and spoke to his conscience, by some awful Providence; "thou fool," who so stupidly forgettest both the dignity and frailty of thy nature, and thy necessary dependance upon thy supreme Lord—know to thy terror, that whilst thou dreamest of a long succession of pleasurable years, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee," and hurried away to its long, but doleful abode.

He promised himself great ease and merriment; but he is "utterly consumed with terrors." He expects to be courted and caressed, by the obsequious flattery of his jovial companions; but the unerring Judge of all the earth calls him by his true name, and proclaims in distinct accents, the greatness of his folly. "As a dream when one awaketh, so O Lord, when thou awakest, thou" despisest his "image." He looks on succeeding years

years as his own, but he is "cast down into destruction. How is he brought into desolation "as in a moment!" His attention was confined to the body, therefore the soul which he had overlooked, is demanded of him, and conducted as a polluted spirit, by evil angels, to mansions of endless woe. He reaps no advantage in death, in judgment, and in the eternal state, from all his large possessions. "Like sheep he is laid in the grave "death feeds on him; his glory does not descend "after him. Though while he liveth, he blessed "his soul; he shall go to the generation of his Fathers; he shall never see the light. Man that "is in honor, and understandeth not, is like the "beasts that perish."

Arrested in the midst of his vain dreams, and compelled to leave all that had ever engaged his attention or pursuit, he is distracted with the piercing demand, "then whose shall those things be "which thou hast provided?" He lately boasted of them as his own; but now "he perisheth, and "leaveth his wealth to others. His inward thought "is, that his house shall continue for ever, and "his dwelling place to all generations; he calleth "his lands by his own name. But surely he walketh in a vain shew, surely he is disquieted in "vain; he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not "who shall gather them."

In the instance of this rich man, we find the circumstances of all who are worldly and sensual distinctly marked. "So is he."—He is overwhelmed with present care, and distracting anxiety.

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His happiness is at a distance, when he shall have attained such and such heights, as his fond imagination points out. But before he tastes the promised happiness, he is arrested by death, and hurried away to that world, where his grovelling spirit shall receive no gratification, but shall pine for ever in extreme misery and unavailing regret, for losing, in pursuit of the businesses, the pleasures or the honors of a vain, a sinful, an insatulating world, the favour of God; and ruining his eternal interests.

We may learn from the parable which is now before us, the true estimate of all worldly things.

They supply us with food and raiment. They sustain the body, and cheer the spirits. They give us such joy, as corn and wine, shared with those in whom we have pleasure, is suited to afford. They are valuable for these, and for no other purposes. But the body, to which alone they have a respect, is that part of human nature, which we have in common with irrational creatures, and must soon put off. A little attention, therefore, is enough to that which we must of necessity lose in a few days or years; and things which sustain and comfort the animal œconomy, ought to be regarded and sought after, as valuable in this respect and no other; whilst the care of the soul, upon which God has impressed his own image, demands our first and constant attention; that its welfare, whose existence runs through eternal ages, may be secured on a certain foundation.

But to prefer the body before the soul; what

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perish-

perisheth in the using, before what endureth to eternal life; the joy which is noisy and suddenly extinguished, before that which is unspeakable and continues for ever, is a folly not confined to the instance in my parable. But alas! it is too common. The consequence is very fatal. Men, in righteous judgment, are allowed to be intoxicated with the world, which they so much abuse. It yields them no real happiness. It distracts them with care, and only amuses them with false shews of some satisfaction at a distance. It disappoints them as they advance, but still encreases their thirst. They continue the same vain and thorny tract, until they are surprized in the regions of darkness and despair.

Shake off, my brethren, the shackles in which you have long been fettered. Break the dangerous charm which has hitherto held you to your ruin. Rouze from the vain dream and the delusive pursuit. Act like men, with whom the care of a rational and an immortal spirit is entrusted. Provide, by all means, for yourselves and families, in the best manner you can, but give not your heart to the world, nor allow it, on any pretence, to withhold your attention from future concerns; lest in the midst of your worldly schemes and pursuits, your life be required of you; and that soul, which you did not know how to value, be, through your neglect of it, lost for ever.

We may also learn from the parable before us, How to use a present world, so as to turn even it, to some valuable account,

In general, we ought to be satisfied with such a share of it, as falls to our lot. It matters not, whether it be little or much. The things thereof cannot with any propriety be called our own. They are entrusted with us only for a little, and then pass from us to others, and from them again to their heirs. They constantly fluctuate, and never stay long with any, nor make him the happier for having been once in his power, when they are gone.

You, therefore, who are poor, have no reason to fret at your circumstances. You are only deprived of things, which considered in themselves, are scarce worth having. You are freed from many an incumbrance in your best pursuits. You have few attachments to the world which makes such little account of you, and have every reason to make it your study, to become "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has prepared for them who love him."

A sufficiency, and an abundance in the world, lead men to new duties. They multiply their temptations indeed, and increase their danger. They run the risk of their future welfare, should they abuse their trust, and rest in the world as their portion. But as they are placed in a post of danger, it is at the same time, the post of honor. They are stewards to whom God has entrusted his fruits and his goods. If therefore they resist temptation, and lay themselves out to be useful, doing good, and communicating to their necessitous and destitute brethren, then they make for themselves bags

bags which wax not old, and secure treasures in Heaven, to which they shall be received when this mortal life is at an end.

From these considerations, let it be the chief concern of every one of us to be "rich towards God." Let us resign ourselves to his will, and fulfil the duties of our respective stations. In one word, let us weigh and remember the estimation which the wisdom of God teaches us to put upon the world, and the things thereof, that they may neither entangle us in our course, nor render abortive our future expectations. "This I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as though they abused it: For the fashion of this world passeth away."

S E R

S E R M O N X.

The Parable of the Talents.

MATTHEW XXV. 29.

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: But from him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath."

G O D expects that the service, in which our particular circumstances enable us to engage, should be performed with cheerfulness and care. The rule, of which he shall afterwards make use, and uses at present, in determining concerning such service, is now before us: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he hath."

In discoursing from these words, I propose, through divine assistance, I. to explain the different characters described in my text; "every one that hath"—"and him that hath not—." II. I shall shew how men are to be treated, according as they belong to the one or the other of these characters.

A review of the context is absolutely necessary, that we may draw, with any degree of exactness, the respective characters in my text. The Christian, in the parable which introduces the text, is compared to a merchant. Our Saviour distributes
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to each, according to his capacity for business, the stock upon which he is to trade. "Unto one he gives five talents, to another two, and to another one."

Suppose these talents to have been gold; an able calculator, well versed in ancient learning, fixes the value of each to be about seven thousand and two hundred pounds sterling. Were the talent referred to, only of silver, the value is considerably above four hundred pounds.

From this circumstance, we conclude, that our capacities considered as rational creatures, and the various other advantages, which we enjoy, either as men, or as Christians, are very valuable. Individuals are as much distinguished by their respective capacities and advantages, as by their countenances, which are so diversified, that few or none are ever found exactly alike. Notwithstanding this variety, I make no doubt, but it shall appear, when the mystery of Providence is discovered, that each were in the circumstances, most suitable for them, in which they might, with great advantage, have served God, and been useful to one another. These capacities and advantages, modified agreeable to the most perfect wisdom, are what the parable before us intends to represent, under the notion of talents, distributed variously, according to the ability of the particular individuals.

These talents are distributed as a stock, to enable the individual to begin a trade, from whence in the issue, he may reap great advantages.

The merchant, having attained through much pains

pains and trouble, a necessary insight into business, patiently follows it out. He watches his opportunities, and makes the most of them. He is ever laying schemes to better his affairs when low, or to secure them when they succeed to his wish. His diligence and perseverance, in plying his business, are proposed, in my parable, for the imitation of Christians, who ought to blush to be out-stripped by him, when an interest of infinite concern is depending. If an earthly prospect can excite such ambition in the one, what ought to be excited in the other, when the inestimable treasures of eternity are in view? Neither can gain their respective end, without industry and care. For were any to hoard up his stock, and to put it to no valuable use, he might as well be stripped of it, for any advantage which it affords; or were he to live entirely upon it, it would soon disappear, and leave him in distress and poverty. But a lawful trade preserves the principal, and brings in at the same time, the necessaries and conveniences of life. This applies in its full weight to the Christian, and persuades him to make an active improvement of his opportunities, because his comfort and interest, during his existence in the present as well as in the future world, are nearly connected with such improvement.

To improve, or to neglect our opportunities, is the distinguishing feature in the characters described in my text, of those who have or have not.

Not to have is expressive of making no use of what is in our power. What is unimproved, is to

to us, as if we had it not. The following verses lead us directly to such an explanation of the phrase. For a thing which we have not absolutely, could not be said to be taken away; but the language is just and expressive, when it speaks of the removal of what we possess, in so unprofitable a manner, that it is, by our guilty neglect, as if it had never been in our power; and then the punishment evidently corresponds with the crime.

To have is, consequently, descriptive of a due improvement of our opportunities, whereby they become highly advantageous.

The explanation we have given of the expressions in my text, is confirmed by like expressions, which are used by Solomon on the very same subject: "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches." The rich man who makes no use of what he has, is considered as having nothing, whilst the poor man who makes a good use of the little which he has, in relieving his own wants, and the wants of others, is accounted to be really rich.

In illustrating this subject a little further, I shall consider the characters in my text, as they appear in the improvement, or misimprovement of the respective gifts of nature, of Providence, and of grace.

The characters before us are discovered in the improvement or misimprovement of the gifts of nature.

Under this particular, come in view all the distinguish-

distinguishing qualities, both of mind and of body, which are the honor of man. The soul is endued with reason and understanding, and possesses a variety of affections. The body is closely connected with the soul, and is furnished with members and organs, which are well-adapted to that connection, and highly advantageous in our present circumstances. We have the advantage which such a nature affords us, over the lower orders of creation, when we apply these respective powers of mind and body to their proper use; acquainting ourselves with God, and recovering that likeness to him, which was once our privilege and our honor; serving him as individuals, and engaging others, in as far as our influence extends, in the same service; and ever making it our study, that attention to the interests of the body, should be subservient to our attention to the higher interests of the spiritual, and never-dying part of our constitution. But when men neither acquaint themselves with God, nor improve his image on their souls; when they neither serve him themselves, nor take any care to engage others in his service; when attention to the body, prevents them from attending to a higher concern they stain the glory of their nature, and give up with all the distinguishing advantages, which raise them high in the scale of being. This is particularly the case with those who advance very daring lengths in a wicked course. Profaning, for instance, the name of God, or reproaching his servants; indulging low appetites, or giving vent to the rage of ungovernable passions; walking

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in "rioting and drunkennels, in chambering and
 "wantonness, in strife and envying; or like fools,
 "making a mock at sin." Such act so much out
 of character, that they are considered as practically
 yielding up all the distinguishing advantages of an
 intelligent nature. They become, on the one hand,
 through sensual gratifications, on a level with the
 beasts that perish; but on the other, through de-
 pravity and corruption, a-kin to these fallen spirits,
 who as enemies of God, are overwhelmed with
 everlasting destruction.

The characters before us are discovered in the
 improvement, or misimprovement of the gifts of
 Providence.

All the distinctions or enjoyments of the world,
 such as wealth or power, preferment or interest,
 connections or respect, arrange under this particu-
 lar. In as far as either, or all of these belong unto
 us, we improve them, when we render them con-
 ductive to the welfare of the souls, and of the bo-
 dies of all around. The rich ought to make their
 possessions a common good, whilst they commu-
 nicate to the necessitous, and effectually relieve the
 destitute. It becomes the man of power, not to
 bear the sword in vain; to be the minister of God,
 for the good of society; a terror to evil doers, ex-
 ecuting wrath upon them; but a praise to those
 who do well, encouraging them with his counte-
 nance and protection. Influence of any nature,
 whether it be confined within the narrow circle
 of our respective families and relations, or extend
 to the more enlarged one of neighbours and ac-
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quaintances, of citizens and subjects, must be used for God; so that children and servants, neighbours and acquaintances, citizens or subjects, are commanded and laid under a restraint, both by the example of the individual and by the particular authority, with which, in his circumstances, he is invested; to "fear God, and to keep his commandments." The individual, in these instances, has, by such improvement, the real possession of the talents entrusted to his care; and shall, in the issue, reap every advantage which they are suited to yield. Abraham is an example of the character under consideration. "He commanded his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment." He used all his influence to maintain peace among brethren. He rescued the oppressed from their enemies. Job also delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him who was ready to perish, came upon him; and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. He put on righteousness, and it clothed him; his judgment was as a robe and a diadem. He was eyes to the blind, and feet was he to the lame. He was a Father to the poor; and the cause which he knew not, he searched out. He broke the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. David, on the throne of Israel, could not endure the unjust, the deceitful or the false, but he cut off all these wicked doers from the city of the Lord; and had his eyes alone upon the faithful of the land.

land. In one word, Jesus of Nazareth, endowed with extensive powers of universal service to the children of men, did not bury his talent, but went about continually doing good.

But the person who makes no good use of such circumstances, as have been mentioned, for the benefit of others, is the character opposed to the one already before us. His riches, his honors, his influence, his power are only a price in a fool's hand, who has no heart to use it. They are so many talents hid in the earth, which include the individual entrusted with them, as a wicked and slothful servant, in very dreadful condemnation. Nabal is such a character. He had large possessions, and extensive power; but he was insensible either to gratitude or to pity, and more apt to insult the distressed, than to countenance and relieve them. If neglecting to improve the gifts of Providence, for the common advantage of fellow men, be the character of those who "have not," the person certainly falls under the same character, with deeper marks of guilt, whose superior advantages, as possessing wealth, or power, or influence, are so perversely abused, as to become the means of gratifying his lust, of inflaming his pride, of corrupting the good manners of others by his evil communications. If hiding our talents, without using them, expose us to irrecoverable ruin, such abuse of them, must draw down seven-fold vengeance on our guilty heads. In Herod the great, all this is fully exemplified. He was lustful and ambitious. He was vicious himself, and encouraged vice in his subjects.

subjects. But he was jealous and mistrustful. His own mind received fresh wounds from the cruelty which he inflicted upon others. He was so conscious that he deserved no affection nor esteem, that he left the world, with the horrid command to massacre the most valuable of his subjects, that the kingdom, at his death, might appear in general mourning. Unhappy in his own mind, and hated of all men, he went to "his own place," a dreadful warning to all, who may afterwards tread the same unprofitable and guilty steps.

The characters before us are discovered in the improvement or misimprovement of the gifts of grace.

Privileges of the most inestimable nature are now in view. They are common and various. They include all the ordinances of the gospel, and opportunities of attending them; sabbaths and sacraments; the ordinary or more extraordinary presence and influence of the Holy Ghost, through whom, in these, we maintain communion with God, and make advancements in the spiritual life. The individual who knows the value of these privileges, reads the word of God daily, and receives instruction from it. He hears it preached, and obeys its command. He remembers the Sabbath day, and keeps it holy. He approaches the table of the Lord, and devotes himself to the service of that Saviour, from whose obedience unto death, arises all his hopes. In these, and in every other act of religion, he relies with confidence, upon the "communion of the Holy Ghost," for support and improve-

improvement. In such conduct, he secures for himself, the various advantages which the means of grace are intended to give; and may justly be said to have in them, a very valuable inheritance. For hereby he meets with instruction and reproof with correction and encouragement, with furniture for present service, and the certainty of serving God in a more perfect manner, in his temple above. The three thousand, who, according to the sacred historian, were added in one day, during the Apostle Peter's ministry to the Christian church, are eminent examples of the character under consideration. "They gladly received his word, and were baptized: They continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Being "daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."

Those who "have not," when the gifts of grace are in question, exhibit a character directly opposite to the one which has now been described. They neither read the word of God regularly, nor receive instruction from it. They seldom hear preached, and never submit to its commands. They have Sabbath days, but they profane them. They have sacraments, but they keep at a distance from them. They quench the influences of the Holy Ghost, and disregard the day of their merciful visitation. In such behaviour, the individual gives up with all pretensions to the Christian name.

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The circumstances of Heathens are much more tolerable than this. The infatuation and ingratitude, the obstinacy and contempt, the perverseness and religion, which mark his character, expose him to many stripes, because he knew, or might have known, his master's will, and did it not. The Jews of Antioch in Persidia, to whom Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, are stigmatized for such a character in all its malignity and guilt. They despised these glad tidings, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Not satisfied with judging themselves unworthy of everlasting life, they raised persecution against these ministers of peace, and expelled them out of their coasts. The same character stains, with more indelible marks of infamy, the cities, wherein our Saviour had preached in person, and wrought many remarkable miracles. They continued, at the very time, when they enjoyed his ministry, in impenitence and unbelief. He upbraids them for their conduct, and pronounces the dreadful doom, in which, in consequence of it, they were soon to be overwhelmed. "Wo unto thee Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done

“ in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have
 “ remained until this day. But I say unto you,
 “ that it shall be more tolerable for the land of
 “ Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.”

We may learn from the characters which have now been delineated, that we lose all the advantages which we enjoy as men or as Christians ; as enriched by nature, by Providence, or by grace ; either whilst we neglect to improve these advantages or abuse them for purposes, very subversive of the end for which they were entrusted with us.

Religion suits human nature. We are happy when it has a seat in the heart, and influences all the conduct. We cannot look around, without observing such strong traces of the Divine presence and perfection, as fill the considerate with reverence for God, and engage him in his service. Where this mean of knowledge leaves us, revelation takes us up. Here we meet with the fullest directions, for regulating our religious conduct, and receive effectual support in maintaining it. And shall we shut our eyes to the traces of the divine presence and perfection, which are everywhere so evident ? Shall we be deaf to the more plain and decisive language of scripture ? In spite of knowledge, and in spite of conscience, dare we allow ourselves to forget God ? and to disregard the precepts of the gospel, which are equally secured by the most alluring promises and terrifying threatenings ?

Such enquiries ought to rouse us from our lethargy, and to engage us in becoming conduct ;

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otherwise we shall be deprived of all the advantages which attend an intelligent nature, highly privileged. On the one hand, we shall be placed in meaner circumstances than the beasts which perish; and on the other, shall become more miserable than the Heathens, who live in the grossest ignorance. The guilt even of Capernaum, was not so aggravated as ours, nor shall its punishment be so exemplary. Christianity was then in its infancy; the mystery of grace was only opening. Miracles were wrought, and prophecies uttered. But now, the religion of Jesus has attained maturity and consistence. The mystery of grace is fully displayed. Miracles have been deliberately examined, and are found so genuine, that the wisest men, in every succeeding age, have considered them as the seal of Heaven to our holy religion; and prophecies are seen in connection with the events in which they are accomplished. In these respects, we enjoy greater advantages than the early ages; and "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"

O my brethren, debase not your natures, nor neglect your privileges. Act like men; act like Christians; act like immortals. Make it your constant study to do the will of God, and to secure his favour; then you shall be the wise improvers of the talents entrusted with you: Who shall meet with the most animating commendation, and encouraging reward; but either to neglect or abuse

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your talents, shall be attended with very fatal consequences. The psalmist's observation, with respect to the righteous and the wicked, is universally true. Let the one be ever so mean and distressed, it shall certainly be well with him at last; but the other, however deep he may take root, and flourish for ever so long a time, he shall in the end be utterly destroyed. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passeth away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

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S E R M O N XI.

The Parable of the Talents.

MATTHEW XXV. 29.

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: But from him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath."

[The second sermon on this text.]

HA V I N G, in a former discourse on these words, attempted, through divine assistance, to explain the different characters of him "who hath"—and "him who hath not:" I am now, in prosecution of the method then laid down, to shew how men are to be treated, according as they shall be found included in the one or the other of these characters.

"Unto every one that hath shall be given."

Industry and care have a certain reward. It is like sowing seed in good ground, which ensures a plentiful harvest. The talents, in the parable, by a diligent trade, were soon doubled. The interest bears a proportion to the principal which each received at first. The five talents, through the diligence of the one, brought him in other five talents, and the two talents, in the hand of the other, gained two other talents besides them. The case is exactly similar, with respect to privileges of any nature, which individuals possess. These may be the

the bounties of nature or of Providence. They may respect our temporal or spiritual concerns. They may immediately suit the animal, or rational part of our constitution. Whatever be their respective nature, we are secured, by the promise in my text, that we shall, in the improvement of them, reap such advantages as they ever afford.

Such a sufficiency of this world, as allows a reserve for charitable purposes, when every moderate demand of an individual, or a family, is answered, is a very valuable talent. The person who receives it, trades upon it, when he becomes a common good, and relieves the necessities of all around. This is a trade of the most lucrative kind. "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again." Men of wealth or of power, of influence or of authority, are entrusted with these advantages, as the stewards of God, for the benefit of others. Being faithful in this office, and universally beneficial, they shall enjoy present peace of mind, and be afterwards heirs of better things than this world can bestow. It is not sufficiently attended unto, that outward advantages of every kind, are entrusted with us, for the service of all who are in our reach; and can only afford us satisfaction and profit, when they are directed to such an end. Were men influenced by this consideration, and did it, as an universal principle, actuate the whole conduct, we should enjoy much more comfort in our respective possessions, and greatly alleviate the ills, with which human life is so much oppressed.

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In this instance, therefore, the truth in my text is distinctly seen; nor does the proof of it rest here; but it is capable of further confirmation, whilst we view it in other lights.

The means of grace are a valuable talent. The person who attends them constantly with a due preparation, and lives agreeable to so inestimable a privilege, shall receive much profit. These yield him comfort and instruction. Religious affections are hereby cherished, and good resolutions confirmed. Temptations are stripped of their enticing charms, and obedience unto God prevails over every opposite inducement. We acquire an extensive acquaintance with the Christian system, and draw from thence, effectual assistance in supporting a character, worthy the disciples of Jesus. Whilst we do our duty, in the instance under consideration, we are strengthened from on high, to pray with fervour, and to sing praise, "making melody in our hearts to the Lord." We receive the word, when it is read or preached, as the oracles of the living God; believing their testimony concerning Jesus, and embracing eternal life, which is placed in our reach. We feed, at the table of the Lord, by a lively faith, on the body and the blood of Jesus, and find the spiritual life sensibly invigorated and advanced. A door is hereby opened, which admits us to all the consolations of the gospel, of which men or devils cannot deprive us; nor can they offer us an equivalent, nor repair their loss, in any of their most admired gifts.

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He who improves his talents, shall not only have a full recompence for all his labour, but besides, such abundance shall be added, as far exceeds his highest hopes.

The servants, in the parable, by diligence in trading upon their talents, whilst they doubled the principal, were at the same time, as an evidence of their master's approbation, raised to stations of peculiar honor and authority. We are instructed, from this circumstance, to expect much present comfort, were our lives regulated according to the will of God, and to receive, besides, the highest marks of distinction, when we have finished the service allotted us here on earth.

Religious dispositions, and religious conduct improve by exercise. The more diligent we are in serving God, we shall find a proportionable fitness for performing this service. The more useful we are unto others, the inclination to do them good and the pleasure attending it, still increases; encouraging us to prosecute, and even to enlarge a course so satisfactory in itself, and universally beneficial. In one word, the more we do for God and for fellow men, a taste for relishing such conduct, and a capacity for executing it, will daily improve. This advancement in the divine life, is well expressed in the bold and figurative language of the prophet. "They that wait upon the Lord, shall
"renew their strength: They shall mount up with
"wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Such progress in the ways of God, as this passage en-
sures,

ures, is certainly included in the "abundance," which my text promises to those who improve their talents.

But besides, there is, in the expression before us, an evident respect to the reward prepared for the faithful servant beyond the grave. He has, even in this world, much more satisfaction and peace than others experience. He makes daily progress in his course. His "path is as the shining light" that shineth more and more unto the perfect "day." His highest satisfaction, on earth, and most settled peace had always some alloy. His greatest progress was imperfect. His brightest day was darkened with intervening clouds. But now no alloy of any kind remains; former imperfections are passed away, and every cloud is dispersed. He receives his final reward, and triumphs in the fulness of his joy, and in his pleasures which continue for evermore. His diligence and integrity, his patience and resolution, his steadiness and perseverance, in the ways of God, shall be found to praise, and honour, and glory; and shall receive so rich and glorious a recompence, as far exceeds any thing, which his service, had it been much more perfect, could ever deserve. This recompence is represented in scripture, sometimes under the allusion of a crown, sometimes of a throne, sometimes of an inheritance, and sometimes, as in my parable, of extensive authority, exactly proportioned to the faithfulness of the servant of God, in managing the talents, committed to his care. This last circumstance intimates, in a particular manner,

ner, that there are different degrees of reward, according to the capacity of the individual, and his former diligence and improvement. However this reward may be diversified in respect of degree and value, an "abundance" shall be given to every faithful servant; making him as happy, as honorable, as glorious, as his nature and capacity can allow.

Whilst the faithful servant receives a very rich return from the improvement of his talents, he who misemploys them, shall meet with irreparable loss. "From him who hath not, shall be taken away, even that he hath."

When we look around in the world, we see persons of great natural ability, possessed also of wealth and of influence, who yet have very little real enjoyment. They neither serve God, nor do good to others. They have no higher desire, but to attain some ambitious view, or gratify some low appetite. In punishment for conduct so mean and so dangerous, God permits them to be anxious and distracted, and thereby removes the comfort, which might otherwise arise from their circumstances. Ahithopel is an example to our purpose. He had great penetration, improved by long experience. His counsel was wholesome, and depended upon, "as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God." But he perverted these natural talents, and became the patron of wickedness and rebellion. God therefore strips him of these advantages. His counsel was good for promoting the impious design; but an over-ruling power defeats

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its effect, by causing it to be disregarded, for counsel which ruined the design, which it was expected to promote. As, in Ahithophel we behold natural powers, which were employed in the service of wickedness, rendered ineffectual, so in the example of the rich man mentioned in the parable, we find that large possessions only yielded anxiety and distress, because they were thrown away in the meanest and most unworthy service. In these instances, the assertion in my text, appears with great evidence: "From him who hath not, shall be taken away, even that he hath."

Nor is the assertion less evident in other instances which are more general.

There are few who have not, at particular times, felt some good inclinations. They had, on these occasions, a strong desire to break off their wicked courses, and to enter upon a religious life. They resolved to be temperate and regular; to do justly, and to love mercy; to acquaint themselves with God, and to walk humbly before him. In consequence of these resolutions, it was their determined purpose, to devote themselves at the table of the Lord, to his service, and to fulfil these engagements through the remainder of life. The serious impression was strong, and the moment was precious when it prevailed. The voice of God and of conscience had reached the heart. But the resolutions which arose, during its continuance, were not immediately performed; therefore they grow weak, and in time disappear. The individual would not know the things which belong to his peace, and

now they are hid from his eyes. He did not serve God when his heart was warm; therefore that warmth no more continues. The gift which was in him, was not stirred up; and that gift being neglected, is enfeebled, and brought to decay. In this dreadful case, the threatening we now explain, is executed in a great degree; and it shews how dangerous it is to quench good desires after God, and his service. For these may wear off, and may never return. The lamp may be put out, without a possibility of its being kindled again for ever.

The situation described, is illustrated by our Saviour, in the instance of a Dæmoniack. He is supposed to have some little respite. But unaffected with his late affliction and deliverance, he remains the slave of vice and of passion. The Dæmon returns to a dwelling, so agreeable to his depraved nature. And besides, he is allowed, by the just judgment of God, on such an incorrigible wretch, to associate with seven other spirits, which are yet more wicked and michievous than himself, and entering in, they dwell there; so that the last state of that man, is much worse than the first. The case is exactly similar, with respect to those who relapse into sin, after receiving some serious impressions, and making considerable advances in external reformation. Their latter end is far worse with them than their beginning. Their conscience becomes seared as with a hot iron. They have even been known to abandon every principle of religion, and every sentiment of wisdom and holiness, as if they were possessed by a multitude of devils,

ils, madly hurrying them on to irrecoverable ruin.

This is fully exemplified in the general character of the Jewish nation, about the time of our Saviour's appearance. They were become so inconsiderate and slothful, so inattentive to the voice of God, and of conscience, that it was said proverbially concerning them, "they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand. This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." An indifference about the means of grace attending or neglecting them, as suits the humour or convenience of the individual; making use of one mean, and passing over another; satisfying ourselves with the performance of worship in the most superficial manner, include others in the very same character. These are alarming circumstances; for indifference and neglect may be allowed, in the just judgment of God, to prevail so far, that no mean of grace, nor no event of Providence, shall be able to rouse or instruct us. The candlestick, as in the case of the seven churches of Asia, may be removed from its place, and we left in total darkness. In either or both of these cases, the talent is "taken away from him who hath not."

The threatening we now examine, looks much farther than to any suffering, which can befall an individual on earth. It directs our view beyond the

the grave, and discovers what the guilty may there expect. In the distribution of the talents, God acts as a master, who has an absolute right in our service. In requiring an account of these talents, he appears to be the judge, who rewards, or punishes men, according as they have served him with faithfulness or negligence.

The wicked, at their respective deaths, are deprived of every opportunity, either of doing, or of receiving good. They have no more space to repent nor Sabbaths to abuse. They are shut out from the assembly of the righteous in Heaven, because they poured contempt upon it, when on earth. They are forbid a place at the table above, who refused to take their seat at the Lord's table here below. The voice of comfort is no more heard, in the solemn day of account, which was so often contemptuously neglected in the day of probation. All that is good or valuable, all that could enable them to act as men or as Christians, all that constitutes present or future happiness, is removed, and leaves these guilty creatures in the most forlorn and wretched circumstances. They are justly stripped of all to vindicate the justice of God, who will not allow his trusts to be perpetually abused, nor his business to be left undone.

"The unprofitable servant" is not only dismissed from the service of God, but is also "cast into outer darkness: There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Men, through inconsideration, neglect to improve their talents. They do not estimate them at a just rate, nor can they be

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persuaded to act like persons, who have in their possession, what is so highly valuable. They may, therefore, very possibly, hear with little concern, of being deprived of that, of which they never knew the real worth. But the connection between such disgrace and the extremity of woe, is inseparable. If the secure cannot be roused, by the thought of their irreparable loss, they ought certainly to be so, by the extreme wretchedness with which it is attended.

Having never acted worthy of reasonable creatures, who are favoured with a divine revelation for the direction of their conduct, they are cast out from the presence of God, with every mark of infamy and disgrace. They are allowed no name nor place, in the regions of light and of joy. Every dismal idea, which "outer darkness," to which they are confined for ever, by an unalterable decree, can suggest, is not adequate to the horror of their situation. "Weeping" expresses the sorrow and pain with which they are tormented. "Gnashing of teeth," represents the greatest destruction and most furious despair. They blame Heaven and earth, God and creatures, angels and men, themselves, and others for their ruin; and being mad with vexation, they are left to wonder, and to perish for ever.

Having now finished our observations, in explaining this passage comfortable, or alarming, just as we improve or neglect our talents, I conclude with exhortations suitable for persons of either character.

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You who seek to serve God to the utmost of your power, have every encouragement to persevere in his service. Whilst you are just in your dealings, whilst you are a common good to all the needy and destitute; whilst you maintain religious worship in your closets and your families; whilst you sit under your Saviour's shadow, and eat his fruit, you possess much more real satisfaction than others enjoy, and are certain of a very glorious issue to all your diligence and your toil. We therefore exhort you, in the earnest language of the Apostle, "cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience; that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But see that ye be not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul."

Persons of an opposite character, who are neither dutiful to God, nor serviceable to fellow-men; who are neither humane nor charitable; who are strangers to closet and family devotion; who do not sit under the Saviour's shadow, nor eat his fruit, ought to consider their danger. There is every circumstance in the divine service, to render it amiable and engaging. God is kind and gracious. He pities your infirmities as a Father, and provides for the supply of your necessities as God. But he requires your immediate compliance with his will:

ill: You otherwise shall forfeit his mercy: The day of grace shall pass over: The accepted time shall no more return: The repentance of Nineveh, under much less advantages than you, shall be produced at last in evidence of your aggravated guilt. Sheba, the queen of the south, shall rise in judgment against you. She came from afar, to hear the wisdom of Solomon; but you shut your ears against that heavenly wisdom, with which your future safety is nearly connected. God shall certainly avenge himself of such ungrateful and rebellious creatures: You shall be utterly destroyed: Tribulation and anguish shall abide upon you forever. You shall be confined to the dreadful prison, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. "The day that cometh, shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble, and the day that cometh, shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

This representation is not the effect of fancy and imagination, but it is a serious and an awful truth, whereby the gospel would persuade men. And we beseech you, my brethren, in the name of Christ, as you regard your present or your future welfare; as you would maintain the character of men or of Christians; as you would please God, and enjoy his favour, which is better than life, lay these things to heart, and set immediately about the improvement of your talents.

The present occasion leads me to be particularly earnest with you, to come to the table of the Lord.

Each

Each of you are bound to comply with this duty. It is a valuable price in your hand. It is indeed an approach unto God, and every approach unto him, ought to be conducted with solemnity and awe. But this approach is softened by many engaging circumstances. We are not invited before our Judge, but before our Saviour. We are not brought forth to hear the sentence of condemnation, but are called to receive the seal of pardon. We are not upbraided with former guilt, but are strengthened to maintain holiness in future conduct.

Have you any regard for the Saviour? Do you expect forgiveness and mercy through his name? Are you ambitious after purity in heart and in life? Then neglect not this ordinance, nor delay your attendance upon it. The consequences of a neglect or a delay may be dangerous and fatal. "Whatsoever," therefore, "thy hand findeth to do," in the service of God, "do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments: For this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

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S E R M O N XII.

The Parable of the barren Fig-Tree.

LUKE xiii. 6—10.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? and he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well: And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

PARABLES form a species of allegory. The prophetical writings are full of them; and they are very common in the gospels. They were used, in compliance with the universal mode, in these early times, throughout all the eastern nations, to convey sacred truths under mysterious figures and representations.

The parable, which is now before us, is less obscure than many others. It excites us to the due consideration and improvement of our privileges, which is always seasonable, but particularly at present, when one great portion of our time is just ending, and we are about to enter upon another.

This parable naturally divides itself into two parts. In the first, we have the attention which

the owner of the fig-tree paid to its cultivation; the reasonable expectation which he entertained of its fruitfulness, and the command which he gave to the dresser of the vineyard, when his expectation failed him. In the last part, the dresser of the vineyard is represented, as interceding for the fig-tree, that the execution of the command for its removal, might be delayed until a later day.

I shall, through divine aid, explain the parable in order, and attend to such instruction, as the different parts of it may suggest.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard."

The fig-tree was common in Judea. It often grew spontaneously by the way side. But this one received particular attention. A certain man claimed it as his own. He planted it in ground which had been well manured; and sheltered it with the same fence which he had thrown around his vines.

The moral here is plain and interesting. The heathen have not many advantages. They "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." They have few other lights to guide their feet, but the approbation or reproof of an ill-informed conscience. They may therefore well be considered, as the plant of spontaneous growth, found in the most common and exposed places. But the Jews were highly favoured. To them belonged "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." God distinguished them, in a peculiar manner, as his children. He dwelt among them

them in a fiery cloud. He engaged, by a solemn covenant, to secure for them the possession of Canaan, and the greatest outward prosperity, provided they should continue to be submissive and obedient. He gave them wise and righteous statutes, as the rule of their conduct. He directed their religious worship, and prescribed them the ritual which they should observe. He cheered their hearts with the prospect of better days, when more valuable blessings than they have yet received, are seen to be in reserve. This attention to Israel is represented in the old testament, by the attention which the husbandman pays to his favourite vineyard in a very fruitful hill. "He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." The Jew, however high he was exalted by his privileges, is, notwithstanding, greatly exceeded by the Christian. We see those things, which many prophets and righteous men desired to see, and have not seen them; and hear those things which they desired to hear, and have not heard them. We are members of that church, to whom God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: until we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge

ledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of "Christ." These advantages, which belonged to the Jews in the first instance, and afterwards to Christians, are represented in my parable, by the attention which this fig-tree received, when the owner thereof, planted it in his vineyard.

The owner, in consequence of his great attention to the favourite plant, entertained very high expectations from it. "He came and sought fruit "thereon."

The labour of this husbandman was considerable. He sought out the best soil. He enriched it with manure. He put his plant, at a proper season, in the ground which he had prepared. He affords it every necessary shelter. In consequence of this, he expects a great plenty of figs to recompence his labour; and is now come, "if haply he "might find any thing thereon."

The truth conveyed under this circumstance, may easily be discovered. The members of the church of God, to whom he hath given peculiar advantages for their spiritual improvement, are hereby described. The Gentiles, like trees, which have not the benefit of cultivation, might bring forth some fruit, and "do by nature, the things "contained in the law." But the persons, who enjoy a divine revelation, being in much more favourable circumstances for this purpose, are altogether inexcusable, if the fruit which they bring forth, be not much greater in its encrease, and more perfect in its kind. No natural cause, nor
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any industry, however well directed, can be more proper for promoting vegetation, and bringing it to perfection, than the advantages, which God affords his people, are for purifying their souls, and qualifying them for his service. Even under the old testament dispensation, "the law of the Lord" is said to be "perfect converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." The tendency which the gospel has to promote the same important ends, is still more efficacious and direct. This "grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Purity of heart and of life is as certain a consequence of the gratitude which ariseth from our deliverance from ruin; of the certainty of future

ture existence, when we shall be accountable for our conduct, and of the rich supply of strength and grace which our Saviour affords us; as vegetation is the consequence of careful cultivation and seasonable weather.

The expectations of the husbandman, from his favourite tree, were greatly disappointed. He "sought fruit thereon, and found none."

It is not said that there were no leaves. Blossoms in all likelihood, were not wanting. These could be no proper equivalent for his great labour. In hope of figs, he had reared this distinguished plant; but when these were wanting, every thing beside was totally disregarded.

This is evidently descriptive of the hearer, who is not a doer of the word. He may have a name to live, and be forward in his profession. But although this may pass among men, it cannot escape him, whose eyes are "a flame of fire," that he is dead. He begins well and promises fair, but as he brings forth no fruit to perfection, he shall at last be rejected as reprobate silver. Such barrenness, under the means of improvement, is exposed by the prophet, in the most affecting light. He addresses himself to the inanimate parts of creation, from whence he was as likely to receive attention, as from the house of Israel. "Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken it, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth

doth not consider." A kind master exercises an easy authority over his servant, and an indulgent father, over his son. The government of God, over his people, is equally easy and indulgent. He expects, therefore, to be considered by them, as standing in relations, which equally command their veneration and regard: and he complains of those, who either overlook his government or hold it in contempt. "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear?"

The miscarriages of one generation, and the notice which God takes of them, are made known unto another, for their warning and improvement. "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, they do alway err in their heart: and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you, an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." If, after such warning and reproof, we still continue unfruitful, the guilt in us shall be more aggravated than in others, and the consequences shall be proportionably dreadful. When God sees us unfruitful, notwithstanding the peculiar advantages which we enjoy, we appear in his eye, like the earth, which bearing "thorns and briars," after it has received

received much rain, "is rejected, and is nigh unto
"to cursing; whose end is to be burned."

The husbandman greatly regrets his disappointment. "Then said he unto the dresser of his vine-
"yard, behold, these three years I come seeking
"fruit on this fig-tree, and find none."

Had his expectation only failed him in the first
year, he might possibly have found some satisfac-
tory account of the matter, from the particular
nature of the tree, of the soil, or of that season.
But when he was disappointed for a second and a
third year, and that after every attention on his
part, and very seasonable weather, he could form
no other conclusion, but that he had thrown away
his attention upon a useless plant; especially, as
botanists agree, that if the fig-tree produces no
fruit in three years, it cannot be expected to do
so in any after period.

The application of this is equally easy, whether
the Jew or the Gentile comes in view.

Applying this circumstance to the Jew, it inti-
mates, that God hath shewn him much attention.
He tried him with different dispensations, and bore
long with him. He used one method before the
captivity, and another after it. He changed his
method a third time, setting him under the ministry
of John the Baptist, and of our Lord himself; of
the twelve apostles and of the seventy disciples.
But no reformation, answerable to such distinguish-
ing advantages, was observed. It filled him with
concern and surprize. "He looked," says the
prophet, concerning the favourite nation, under

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the allusion of a choice vine, "that it should bring
 " forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.
 " And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men
 " of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my
 " vineyard. What could have been done more
 " to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?
 " Wherefore when I looked that it should bring
 " forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"
 Our Lord, in the days of his flesh, bewails in the
 same passionate language over the Jews, because
 of their perverseness and disobedience. "O Je-
 " rusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets,
 " and stonest them that are sent unto thee;
 " how often would I have gathered thy children
 " together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her
 " wings, and ye would not."

Applying the circumstance under consideration
 to the Gentiles, it intimates that God also had a
 kind regard for them. Before the flood, when all
 the nations had corrupted their way, God called
 them to repentance, by the ministry of the antede-
 luvian patriarchs, and particularly by that of Noah,
 who strove, for an hundred and twenty years, by
 the immediate direction of Heaven, to bring about
 so important an end. Even after the flood,
 when idolatry universally prevailed, and God had
 given men over to a reprobate mind, because they
 did not like to retain him in their knowledge, he
 still discovers for them a paternal affection. Abra-
 ham the friend of God, travelling from one coun-
 try to another, instructed them in the truth, which
 had been greatly corrupted. His descendants

when in Egypt, spread the fame of Jehovah through that extensive empire. They were stationed in the wilderness and in Canaan, like the sun in the universe, to diffuse divine light throughout the neighbouring nations. Their captivity, in Babylon, was over-ruled for the same important end; for wherever they went, they carried with them the knowledge of their God and of their religion. And besides, God raised up from among the Gentiles themselves, wise and discerning men, who gave them wholesome and important instruction. In these respects, he did not leave himself, even among idolatrous nations, without a witness. These dealings have an expressive language. "How shall I give thee up," O sinner? "How shall I deliver thee," O idolater? "How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? "Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

This fig-tree, by being unfruitful, "cumbered the ground."

It filled the place, and received the nourishment, which a fruitful tree might have filled and received with great advantage; but in the present instance, the place was occupied by a barren plant, and the nourishment exhausted to little purpose.

This part of my parable plainly intimates, that the irreligious and immoral are very bad members of society. They refuse instruction and despise reproof. They erase from their own minds, all the traces of the divine image. They disregard the work which has been assigned them, in consequence

sequence of the distinguished rank which they hold among creatures. They hasten by such conduct to, and even seem earnestly to court their own ruin. The contagion of such example is very dangerous. It spreads with rapid progress and infects the whole. The hands of the godly themselves are hereby weakened, and their hearts discouraged. The impenitent receive countenance, and harden themselves in their guilty courses. The feet of the young are turned from the paths of wisdom, and are enticed to the ways of folly and destruction. Thus in the place of the noble plant, with which God intended to adorn the earth, a noxious weed appears, which overspreads and spoils the ground.

The husbandman, having lost all hopes of reaping any advantage from his once highly-favoured tree, gives at last the decisive order, "cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground."

Many methods had been tried, and sufficient time was allowed, in order that these methods might produce their full effect. But all is to no purpose: this tree is barren in itself; it is useless to the owner: it cumbereth the ground. There can therefore be no good reason given why it should be spared.

This circumstance instructs us, that God will not always strive with man. If they abuse his patience, it will wear out: If they neglect his mercy, that mercy will give place to severe justice. If they continue impenitent and unholy, they are left to the awful consequences of appearing in such a situation, before an holy and a justly offended God.

God. Their mountain may stand strong, and their strength be firm. They may experience little trouble, and have few of the plagues with which others are oppressed. They are not, however overlooked by God, nor out of the reach of his vengeance. "Though they dig into hell," thence "shall" his "hand take them: though they climb "up to Heaven, thence will" he "bring them "down. And though they hide themselves in the "top of Carmel," he "will search and take them "out thence: and though they be hid from" his "sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will" he "command the serpent, and he shall bite them: "and though they go into captivity before their "enemies, thence will" he "command the sword, "and it shall slay them: and" he "will set his "eyes upon them for evil, and not for good." Heaven and earth, the animate and inanimate parts of creation, angels, men, and even devils themselves, are in arms to avenge their Creator's quarrel, and to execute his will in destroying before him, these his enemies. The sinner may be secure and think of no danger; but his desolation shall come in a moment, and he shall be utterly consumed. The circumstances which gave rise to the parable under consideration, illustrate in an affecting manner, the utter ruin, with which sinners are suddenly to be overwhelmed. The Galileans, by rebellious practices, were become obnoxious to the Roman government. Unsuspicious of harm, they had repaired to Jerusalem, at the yearly festival. Their offerings were ready, and were brought in-

to

to the temple. The solemn services were begun, and the victims bled at the altar. The sword of Pilate, unawed by that sacred place, and unmoved by these services, wherewith God himself became propitious, overtook these helpless worshippers, and mingled their own blood, with the blood of the sacrifices which they offered. From the fountain of Siloam, a little stream flowed into the city, which was received into a reservoir near the temple. The devout Jews frequented this pool, for their purification. Many of them, at a late feast, had reached its bank, and leaped into the flood. At that instant, a neighbouring tower tottered on its basis, and overwhelmed them in ruin. The wrath of God shall surprize the sinner as suddenly, and burst with more intolerable vengeance upon his guilty head. It overtook the Jews, when assembled together, on one of their great festivals; and shall seize every thoughtless wretch, who remains unprofitable, when he is least aware of his danger.

The subject before us, gives a very important lesson. It discovers "the ax" at "the root of the trees." It assures us, that "every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." Let the barren sinner lay this to heart. You have been planted in the vineyard of God. You have enjoyed the cultivation of his ordinances. You have been watered with divine influences, which are efficacious and refreshing when improved, like the former and the latter rains. But how far does the fruit you bring forth, come short of what might be expected from

from your advantages? How long have you disappointed the fondest hopes, and most friendly desires of your heavenly Father? He has borne with some of you, not for three only, but even for ten or twenty, and with many, for a number of years, much beyond that amount. The awful sentence might long before now have gone forth, "cut them down, why cumber they the ground? It has been deferred through the compassions of our God; but presume not on this to harden yourselves in sin. The divine patience may perhaps bear with you no longer. The day of grace may be about to close. Though "there may be hope "of a tree, when it is cut down, that it may sprout "again," yet when the sentence is executed upon you, your "root shall be as rottenness, and "your blossom shall go up as dust. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in "pieces, and there be none to deliver. Kiss the "Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the "way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: "blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

S E R-

S E R M O N XIII.

The Parable of the barren Fig-Tree.

LUKE xiii. 6—10.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none," &c.

[The Second Sermon on this text.]

I H A V E, in a former discourse, entered upon the explanation of this parable. I observed, that it divides itself into two parts. In the first, we have the attention which the owner of the fig-tree paid to its cultivation, the reasonable expectation which he entertained from hence, of its fruitfulness, and the command which he gave to the dresser of the vineyard, when his expectation failed him.

Having proceeded thus far, we are now arrived at the last part of the parable, wherein the dresser of the vineyard is introduced pleading for the fig-tree, that the execution of the command for its removal, might be delayed until a later day.

"He answering" the husbandman, "said" many things "unto him" in behalf of the favourite plant.

The dresser of the vineyard is, in a particular manner, descriptive of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Mediator between God and man. He is our Advocate with the Father. He makes intercession for transgressors. His appearance in this character

character is very effectual. It protects the guilty from intolerable vengeance. It obtains for them "mercy, and plenteous redemption." It opens extensive communications of grace, for every pressing necessity.

The ministry of men, in the wisdom of God, is made use of, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The persons who are employed in this service, are also included in the description of the dresser of the vineyard, because they are under the strictest obligation, to give themselves "continually to prayer," as well as to the "ministry of the word." Their intercession, for the particular charges with which they are intrusted, has all its efficacy from the intercession of our great high priest, who is passed into the Heavens: they therefore have a constant respect to it, in executing so material a part of their office, and derive from hence the highest encouragement.

Our Saviour himself, when in the flesh, and all his servants in that and in every succeeding age, are represented in this part of my parable, as grieved for the unfruitfulness of those, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers, and alarmed at their danger; which makes them pray with great earnestness, that their respective flocks may not be given over to the dreadful consequence of such fatal conduct.

The husbandman, having been disappointed for three years successively, in his expectations from the fig-tree, had at last given the decisive command,

cut

"cut it down;" but the dresser of the vineyard interposes in its behalf, "Lord, let it alone this year also."

A strong attachment towards this plant is evidently discovered. The owner had taken every step to bring it to perfection. He regrets its barrenness during several years; and is now ready to give it up as useless, when the dresser of the vineyard, observing the reluctance with which he had given the fatal command, begs his patience a little longer, until such steps were taken as have a tendency to prevent the necessity of its execution. This circumstance intimates that the ministers of Christ, in compassion to souls, are very earnest with the shepherd of Israel that he may spare his flock. They fill their mouths with arguments, and are particularly encouraged from the consideration of "his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering," and they urge this perfection of his nature, in support of their particular plea. He has borne long with others, and has waited to shew them mercy: but his regard for men is still the same, and his name is as much glorified now as it has been formerly in their salvation. He allowed the old world an hundred and twenty years to return, and to make their peace with him. Sodom and Gomorrah were spared until wickedness became so universal, that one righteous person could not be found amongst them, except Lot, who was not a native, but only a sojourner. The Israelites were detained on the borders of Canaan, for forty years, until the inhabitants of that fertile country

Had filled up the measure of their iniquity. Jerusalem, which killed the prophets, and stoned those who were sent unto them, had often been chastised by afflictive providences ; but had never been given up to total destruction, before the most daring provocations had rendered it absolutely necessary to set it forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of Heaven. The divine perfection which these instances discover, lays the foundation for earnest prayer. The ministers of Christ improve it, when they intercede for sinners, that judgment may not be immediately executed against their evil ways. They make use of some such language as the following :

“ Justly, O Lord, mightest thou cut us down as
“ cumberers of the ground. We have overlooked
“ thy providence. We have drunk in iniquity
“ like water. We have disregarded the ordinances
“ which thou hast appointed for our reproof and
“ correction. To us belongeth confusion of face,
“ because we have sinned against thee. To the
“ Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses ;
“ let, we beseech thee, thine anger and thy fury
“ be turned away from us. Spare us a little longer ; this year also, before we go hence and are
“ no more. Exercise us with such providences as
“ tend most for our advantage, and continue the
“ means of grace, which encourage our return to
“ thee. Cast us not away from thy presence ; and
“ take not thy holy Spirit from us : that we may
“ neither be unmindful of thee, nor any longer
“ unprofitable servants.”

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The dresser of the vineyard intercedes for the fig-tree, that it might be let alone for one year longer, until he should "dig about it and dung it."

This distinguished plant had enjoyed peculiar attention. Many things had been done to bring it to maturity. One thing still remains. The earth might be loosened about its roots, and anew enriched with manure. The dresser of the vineyard requests so much time as might enable him to make this last attempt; and resolves, were his request granted him, to set about that work with great diligence and perseverance.

In as far as the Jews are in question, who had long been exalted to Heaven, by the most valuable privileges, the circumstance under consideration, intimates, that judgment against them, for their evil works, at the request of Christ, was deferred, until they enjoyed new advantages for their conviction and amendment. They received constant instruction from Moses and the prophets, and had important lessons conveyed them, under the ceremonial and ritual parts of their religion. But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the abundant effusion of the Holy Ghost upon the early Christians, endowing them with a great diversity of gifts and operations, gave them the highest possible advantages, to encourage their submission to the faith and obedience of the gospel.

The circumstances of Christian churches in general, may also be intended in the parable, by the resolution which the dresser of the vineyard is supposed to have taken up. Their respective pastors,
upon

upon surveying their flocks, are excited to pray in their behalf. Discouraged by many fruitless attempts for the welfare of souls, they take a solemn review of their own conduct. New exertions are hereby excited, and they begin afresh to ply their work with encreasing diligence. In the continual exercise of prayer, and the diligent performance of the ministry, they seek to rouse the secure and to confirm serious impressions wherever they appear to be made. Ever jealous of themselves, and much concerned for those, whom the Holy Ghost hath committed to their charge, they often pour out their souls before their heavenly Father, in such strains of devotion as the following :

“ Forgive, most gracious God, what thou may-
 “ est have seen amiss in the performance of thy
 “ service. Save thy people, and support thy
 “ church. Strengthen our hands, and encourage
 “ our hearts, that we may set before them more
 “ distinctly thy terrors, and testify unto them,
 “ more fully of thy grace. May we persuade
 “ them by precept and by example. Let us have
 “ grace, whereby we may serve thee acceptably,
 “ with reverence and godly fear. May we be the
 “ pastors according to thine own heart, who shall
 “ feed thine Israel with knowledge and under-
 “ standing. Remove not their teachers into a cor-
 “ ner, but may their eyes see their teachers, and
 “ may their ears hear a word behind them, saying,
 “ this is the way, walk ye in it, when they turn to
 “ the right hand, and when they turn to the left.
 “ Having line upon line, and precept upon pre-
 cept,

cept, here a little and there a little, may they at last be overcome by thy goodness and forbearance; and repenting of their sins, lay hold on eternal life."

The patience of the owner and the industry of the vine dresser, give a very favourable prospect. "If it bear fruit, well;" or, as the phrase in the original may be rendered, "perhaps it may bear fruit," then it shall be well.

To loosen the earth about the fig-tree, and to warm and to fatten the ground at the root with dung, and suitable manure, afford a certain prospect of fruitfulness, were the plant in itself of any real value. The husbandman, in this case, would think it well that he had "let it alone," and the dresser of the vineyard would take pleasure, at the recollection of the industry, which was attended with such success.

Such instruction is hereby given, as may respect equally the Jews who lived at our Saviour's time, or Christians in general through every succeeding age. The Jews had almost filled up the measure of their iniquity. They rejected the messenger of the covenant, who published among them the glad tidings of peace. They "killed the prince of life." They shut their eyes against the light which began to dawn, as the sun of righteousness arose upon a benighted world. They were, however, once more called to repentance, and pressed to this with arguments which might well soften the most obstinate heart. The Saviour, when they were spilling his blood, interceded in their behalf:

Father;

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." His ministers had it in charge, that repentance and remission of sins, should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." And the Holy Ghost, with gifts and operations of the most astonishing nature was shed forth upon the disciples before their eyes and for their advantage. These circumstances were well suited to satisfy all their scruples, and to cast down every high and rebellious thought. "The word of God" accordingly "increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

The patience of God with men, and the faithful discharge of the ministry, have in all ages an equal tendency to alarm the unconcerned, and to encourage saints to hold fast the profession of their faith. "My doctrine," says Moses, speaking of the name of the Lord which he was commanded to publish, "shall drop as the rain: my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." The influence of seasonable rain, in reviving and cherishing vegetation, is not greater than that of the word of God in producing the dispositions, and confirming the conduct which becomes rational and dependent creatures. "The word of God," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, "is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and mar-

row; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The human body cannot resist a sword, when pushed with violence against it; no more can the mind, either the evidences of the word, exposing the evil of sin, or its persuasions, exciting us instantly to escape from the ruin, to which we are hereby exposed. The experience of every succeeding age, confirms the efficacy of the word whenever it is faithfully delivered. When the patience of God, continuing with men the privileges which are so well adapted for their reformation, produces this important end: then it is *"well"* for the individual, who is plucked as a brand out of the burning. Jesus Christ is satisfied, at seeing this happy consequence of the travel of his soul. Angels and the spirits of just men made perfect rejoice, because sinners are saved. In this, even God himself is represented as taking pleasure. The argument then, which ariseth from this part of the parable, when the ministers of the gospel intercede for their people, seems to be this:

"They have, O Lord, been forgetful of thee, and have made little improvement under the means of grace. But remove not privileges so necessary for their welfare. These may yet be effectual to reach their hearts. They have reached the hearts of others as much accustomed to do evil. May we support more worthily the sacred character; and bless, we beseech thee, our endeavours; sending the rod of the Redeemer's strength out of Zion: by which he rules in the midst of his enemies. Then, Lord, a willing

“ling people shall come to thee in the day of thy
 “power; they shall be engaged with the beauties
 “of holiness, and thou shalt have conquests as nu-
 “merous as the drops of dew in the morning.”

If the fig-tree should still continue unfruitful
 after the dresser of the vineyard had digged about
 it, and dunged it, he gives his consent that “after
 “that,” it should be “cut down.”

The three years trial of its fruitfulness, without
 success, would have justified such a step; but it
 is altogether unavoidable, if it continues to be ne-
 cessary, when its trial was prolonged during ano-
 ther year, and additional advantages enjoyed.

This circumstance intimates, that God will not
 shew mercy to any, in prejudice of his justice.
 The contentious, and those who do not obey the
 truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall meet with
 indignation and wrath. This is exemplified in a
 dreadful manner in the Jews. Having not only
 rejected Moses and the prophets, but also despised
 the Messiah, and resisted the spirit striving with
 them, in the most evident and astonishing opera-
 tions, they were given up in the just judgment of
 God, to impenitency and insatiation. They even
 hastened their own destruction; and became more
 active in demolishing the temple, and wasting the
 city, than Titus Vespasian himself, with all his nu-
 merous legions. Every unprofitable sinner, who
 can neither be persuaded by the terrors of the law,
 nor by the grace of the gospel, shall in like man-
 ner, sooner or later, be overtaken by the judgments
 of God. He would not, when on earth, accept of

Jesus

Jesus as his Mediator, nor receive his law. But he must soon behold him as his judge, and feel tribulation and anguish at hearing the severe sentence, "depart from me, ye that work iniquity." There shall not be an individual to appear in his behalf, but the full choir of angels and of men shall assent to the justice of this decision; re-echoing their assent through all their ranks, "thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shall be, because thou hast judged thus. Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

Having now finished our observations in explaining this parable, we may learn, from that part of it which has now been before us, that such prayers only are acceptable unto God, as are accompanied with our best endeavours.

The dresser of the vineyard not only intercedes for the fig-tree, but also digs about it and dungs it. We propose this example for your imitation; and assure you, you cannot otherwise have success, whether the object of your desire be present or future blessings; whether it respects the body or the mind; whether it be yourselves or others, for whom you pray.

If, for instance, you pray for food, for raiment; or for friends, you must, that such prayers may be effectual, be diligent in business, and careful of what you have; and become, by a prudent, a modest and an obliging behaviour, the proper objects of esteem and respect.

If you seek after forgiveness of sin and purity of nature,

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nature, you can only expect to be heard, when you watch carefully against the repetition of any former sin, and set, with diligence, about the performance of the first and second tables of the law; firmly resolved, through the grace of God, till you die, not to remove your integrity from you.

In one word, if you have the welfare of others at heart, and pray that they may be saved, and become heirs of life and immortality, God never considers you to be in earnest, nor will he listen to your prayer, unless your example and influence plead with others, whilst you plead for them, with God, that they may not be swallowed up with excessive care about many things, to the neglect of the one thing which is needful, the good part which would not be taken from them.

It is a daring mockery of God, to pray for blessings, for which, by our conduct, we shew great indifference. Let us, therefore, with our prayers, be diligent in the use of every correspondent mean, and regular in our lives; then our own experience shall make us certain, that God is the hearer of prayer; through whose blessing "the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

We may also learn, from the doctrine now before us, the importance of our present circumstances.

It is now you may act a part worthy the rank which you hold in creation, and safe for those who possess intelligent and immortal natures. You have in the goodness of God, every advantage for this purpose; and are persuaded, from considera-

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tions of the most cogent nature, to improve these advantages. And can you wantonly abuse the mercy and grace of God? Can you persevere, with obstinacy, in conduct which counteracts the very intention of your receiving existence? Is it possible that certain ruin can be before your eyes, without producing any change in your heart or life? Be not, my brethren, so fatally blinded to your own interest; learn to act a wise and safe part; approve yourselves to be the followers of Jesus Christ, and be ambitious for the crown of life which he places in your view.

To encourage your most active exertions, we now remind you, that the future state shall immediately receive you at the separation of soul and body, and shall reveal the most unspeakable delight, or intolerable misery, just as you improve or neglect your present privileges. I leave it to yourselves to judge what concern, what diligence, what exertions become you, when a thing of such consequence as endless happiness or endless misery are at stake. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

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SERMON XIV.
Christ our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification,
and Redemption.

1 CORINTHIANS, i. 30.

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God, is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."

THE objects, which are held in the greatest estimation among men, and shine brightest in their eyes; lose their importance, and fall under a total eclipse, when they come in review, with the objects which Christians esteem and admire. We are presented with a comprehensive summary of these, in my text; "but of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

I propose, through divine assistance, in discoursing from these words, to explain the doctrine contained in them;—and then, to point out the improvement which we ought to make of that doctrine.

In explaining the doctrine contained in my text, I observe,

1st, That "of him are ye in Christ Jesus." That is, of God, as the fountain of all blessings, ye Corinthians are called to share such blessings as men inherit "in Christ Jesus," who is the channel, through

through which they receive whatever is truly valuable.

To say, that they were "in Christ Jesus," is to say at once that they possessed all that ought to deserve our regard. For christianity ennobles men, and enriches them beyond what the world can pretend to do. Its ministers, indeed, at this early period, were poor and unlearned; and its converts generally of the lowest rank; but as Christians, they became great and honorable, being supplied with the fulness of the God-head, and enriched with all the treasures of eternity. The riches of the divine mercy and grace are fully displayed, by bringing any, into circumstances of such peculiar distinction. There are many privileges, by which we are distinguished; and each is estimated according to its respective nature. Of these, life, and whatever is provided for its sustenance and comfort, are by no means the least. But life itself, and whatever is provided for its sustenance and comfort, were forfeited by disobedience. Christianity restores what we have forfeited; and even places the individual, in much happier circumstances, than those from which he fell.

"Christ of God is made unto us,"
2d, "Wisdom:" This character, in the Saviour of mankind, bears a correspondence to their ignorance and folly; whereby the one may be removed, and the other corrected. All the wit, of the most eminent for their learning and sagacity, either among the Jews or the Gentiles, is challenged by our apostle, to produce any scheme equal to the gospel,

gospel, either for diffusing useful knowledge through the world, or for engaging men to regulate their conduct, according to the wise and profitable maxims which they propose. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" The sages from among the Gentiles, and the scribes from among the Jews; with the disputer of the age, who might belong either to the one or to the other, boasted much of their sagacity; and made no doubt of managing successfully, any argument in which they might be engaged. The highest result of *their* wisdom, however penetrating their genius, however subtle their reasoning, and accurate their distinctions, was found to be vain and foolish, for instructing the world, and reforming their manners, in comparison of the great effects which God produces in both these respects, by the gospel; not only unassisted by their wisdom, but struggling against the most powerful opposition, which it could throw in the way.

Jesus Christ, during his personal ministry, gave his instructions in apt parables and easy precepts. He enforced these by an example of the most perfect and familiar kind. He entrusted plain and unlearned men, who were remarkable for the purity of their manners, and for a sincere regard to truth, with the important office of teaching men his precepts and commands. The world, by their means, became acquainted with their Saviour. Sinners were persuaded, by his gracious invitations, "to turn from darkness to light." They beheld,

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in his own example, the conduct which he required them to maintain. Their eyes were directed to the cross, where Jesus shed his blood for the remission of the sins of many. "Life and immortality were brought to light," to animate their hope, and encourage their perseverance, in the most undoubted assurances, that their divine Saviour, entered in triumph upon the highest honors of the invisible world. These doctrines, delivered in the most simple manner, but with an honest boldness, and attended with the demonstration of the spirit, and with power, had such an effect in persuading those to whom they were published, to "cleanse" themselves "from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," as evidently disgraced every human attempt for such purposes, and manifested these doctrines to be the product of divine wisdom for the salvation of men.

In respect, therefore, of the instruction which our Saviour has given us, concerning our best and eternal interests, and the effectual method which he has taken to make these instructions understood, and to secure their influence over the heart and conduct, he may justly be described, as made of God unto us "wisdom."

But he also is made,

3d, "Righteousness," as well as wisdom."

This character in the Saviour corresponds to the guilt of mankind. All the devices of the Gentile world were insufficient to satisfy an accusing conscience, and a cumbrous train of rites and sacrifices

fices, only amused without affording much relief. The Jewish ritual itself, although of divine appointment, and well adapted to the circumstances of the church, at this early period, was so defective in the main point, that our apostle, with great force of argument, elsewhere declares, "if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain;" there being no necessity for his death, in purchasing the justification, which on this supposition was already obtained. "But what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Faith in him, who gave himself for the remission of the sins of many, shall certainly be imputed to us "if we believe in God, who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Having satisfied the justice of God, and done what was necessary perfectly to secure the honor of the divine government, in the pardon and acceptance of penitent and believing sinners, he makes it safe for them, to trust with unsuspecting confidence in that God, who discharged from further claim upon their surety, is ready to grant the full forgiveness of every sin, an abundant entrance into his heavenly kingdom.

Our offences have been repeated, and greatly aggravated. Our own minds are hereby disturbed. God is become our enemy, and terrifies us with the

the awful threatning "vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Without an atonement, effectual to reconcile us to God, and to procure our justification, we could neither enjoy present peace, nor have any good hope for the time to come. But the obedience of Jesus unto death, according to the divine appointment, "for transgressors," revives their spirits and encourages their hopes.

This scheme of grace is unfriendly to licentiousness. It establishes, on the firmest foundation, the necessity of personal holiness; laying us under the strongest obligations to attain it, and providing so effectually against our depravity, that this high attainment becomes not only possible, but even easy: for our Saviour instructs and justifies us, that we may be in a capacity,

4th, For receiving him as our "sanctification."

Were we strangers to the divine mercy, and unacquainted with the way to escape from that wrath, which we are conscious we deserve, there could be no room, either to attempt to please God, or to better such desperate circumstances. The gospel affords us direction and help; it publishes salvation for men unto the ends of the earth; it puts that grace in their offer, which changes not only their circumstances, but also their dispositions; which discharges them from condemnation, and transforms them by the renewing of their minds; which forms the principles and confirms all the habits of holiness.

Jesus Christ, as our "sanctification," has pur-

chased for us the influences of the blessed spirit, which are effectual in producing "the new man," "which after God is created in righteousness and "true holiness." Men of wrathful and ungovernable tempers, hereby become meek and gentle. Covetous and selfish dispositions give place to those of a liberal and generous kind. The fearful and unbelieving, who avoid shame and disgrace, at the risk of a good conscience, take up the most firm and determined resolution to serve God. The lustful become exemplary for their chastity, the intemperate for their sobriety, and the vain, for their gravity of conduct. The unjust learn to practice justice; the foolish, prudence; and the immoral, the strictest precepts of morality. In one word, the blessed spirit teaches the individual wherein he is ignorant. He humbles him for the disorder and guilt which have hitherto prevailed to his disgrace. He corrects what he finds amiss, and furnishes him for maintaining good works; persuading and enabling him "to cleanse himself from all filthiness "of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the "fear of God." Many among the Corinthians, who had once been "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with "mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, "extortioners," upon believing the gospel, were "washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name "of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The character of the Cretians, in their unconverted state, is peculiarly odious. They were "foolish "disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures,

“pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and
“hating one another.” But upon their being
“saved by the washing of regeneration, and renew-
“ing of the Holy Ghost,” they became “careful
“to maintain good works.” And indeed this grace
of God which bringeth salvation, wherever it ap-
pears, teaches men, “that denying ungodliness and
“worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righte-
“ously, and godly in this present world.”

Our Saviour, in the text, is declared,

Lastly, to be made of God unto us “redemption.”
There is also a correspondent evil in human na-
ture, of which this is the remedy. Are we the
slaves of passion and appetite? has Satan great ad-
vantage over those who have lost the government
of themselves, leading them easy captives at his
pleasure? are we, in consequence of such circum-
stances, exposed to wretchedness and ruin? Then
the redemption here spoken of, delivers us from
all these evils. The violent passion and irregular
appetite are brought under the direction of reason
and religion. Satan is deprived of his advanta-
ges against us, and power over us; and escaping
from ruin and misery, our nature becomes per-
fect, and our happiness complete.

Our Saviour, in executing the offices illustrated
under the former particulars, makes way for his
appearing in the character in which we now con-
sider him. Whence he removes our ignorance
and corrects our folly; he knocks off the chains
which detain us in bondage, and sets open our
prison doors; procuring our justification, and ren-
dering,

dering us acceptable unto God, he raises our hope; and animates our resolution. In our sanctification, we are led on to the most active exertions, both to please God, and to recover the impression of his image which we had lost. But the work so successfully begun, and so far advanced, is made perfect in that "redemption," which, freeing us from every natural and moral defect, advances our purity and happiness, to the highest pitch of which human nature is capable. A "glorious liberty" remains for "the children of God," who shall be entirely "delivered from the bondage of corruption." In respect to purity, they shall be "without spot and blemish." Their happiness shall be complete, both in kind and duration, being continually in his presence, which imparts to all the heavenly inhabitants, "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore." They are no more in danger from an ensnaring world, a tempting Devil, or a deceitful heart; for where they dwell, there is nothing to hurt nor to destroy; but even death itself is swallowed up in victory. This corruption having put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality, they attain that happy state, when "the tabernacle of God" shall be found to be "with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow "nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; "for the former things are passed away."

In the doctrine which has now been explained,

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we discover a certain remedy for ignorance and folly;---for disobedience and guilt;---for pollution and infirmity;---for the present disorder of our minds, and the intolerable evils, which originate from thence in the eternal world.

Let us examine, whilst we are made acquainted with a remedy for ignorance and folly; how far we as individuals are characterized, that whatever is defective and blameable, may be corrected and removed.

The religious knowledge, which is most profitable for practice, respects the duty which we owe to God,---our neighbour,---or ourselves. Do we then know God, as to fear and to serve him? Do we sanctify him in our hearts, and honor him in our lives? Do we learn his will, and comply with it? Do we acquaint ourselves with his statutes, and observe them? influenced by his threatnings and promises, do we cease to do evil, and learn to do well? or, is the reverse of all this exactly the truth;---whilst we neither fear, nor serve him;---neither sanctify him in our hearts, nor honor him in our lives; neither acquaint ourselves with his statutes, nor walk in them;---and uninfluenced by his threatnings and promises, we neither cease to do evil, nor learn to do well. In this dreadful case there is a defect, in what is at the foundation of all religion; and a folly, which draws after it a train of the most pernicious consequences.

After such a fundamental error, it may be expected that universal love, to fellow men will be but ill maintained, and all the generous principles of

of christianity entirely reversed. The individual will neither endure provocation, nor cover the faults of his neighbour. He will neither keep within bounds; nor believe any thing to the advantage of those, who have the unhappiness to displease him. He vaunts himself, and is puffed up with self-conceit. He behaves unseemly; and seeks only his own reputation and profit. He gives a willing ear to the worst reports concerning others; and even suspects much more than is told him. He is envious should any excel him; and endeavours by detraction and calumny to bring them down to his own level, and if possible to depress them under it. Men could never allow themselves, in what is so ungenerous and selfish, did they consider one another as brethren, and yield to this as a first principle, in directing their conduct towards them. Whilst God and men are overlooked, it is not to be thought, that self government should be steadily maintained, and well directed; and there is no doubt but that, whilst violent appetites, and irregular passions prevail over reason and conscience, we must labour under a deplorable ignorance of what is most valuable in human nature, and be actuated by an inexcusable folly; which hurries us on in such unwise and dangerous courses.

If these circumstances discover in any degree our character, it becomes us immediately to improve that "wisdom," which God has provided for the removal of our ignorance, and the correction of our folly. We must receive the doctrine which impresses the heart, with a sense of our ob-

igation to love God and one another. We must
 ever set before us that example, which is an easy,
 and familiar instance of what is required of us in
 his doctrine. We must earnestly seek after the
 influences of the blessed Spirit, who removes our
 ignorance, who corrects our folly, and ushers in a
 glorious light upon those who have hitherto been
 bewildered in gross darkness. Putting ourselves,
 in this manner, under the direction of God, to be
 taught as ignorant and corrected as erring crea-
 tures, we shall certainly find the gospel to be "his
 wisdom, and power for our salvation." Let the
 sinner therefore submit himself entirely to him,
 and let the saint renew his submission, that the one
 may find a remedy for his disease, and the other may
 have the remedy already begun, fully completed.
 A remedy for disobedience and guilt; as well as
 for ignorance and folly is now before us. God
 was greatly offended; and his justice required that
 speedy vengeance should be taken upon a guilty
 race, in order to support the honor of his govern-
 ment. All mankind were obnoxious to punish-
 ment, and could not possibly escape. But Jesus
 dying for their offences, and rising again for their
 justification, discharges those who receive him in
 his character from punishment; and restores them
 to that favour of God, which imparts life and hap-
 piness to every creature. Duty, therefore, as well
 as interest, persuade us to submit to this appoint-
 ment of God, for the justification of the guilty.
 Conscious of the highest demerit, let us by all means
 cherish a humble and a contrite spirit; but at the
 same

same time admit with gratitude, these views, which
 “revive the spirit of the humble and revive the
 “heart of the contrite ones.”

This high expression of the riches of divine grace, neither lays a loose rein upon the lusts and passions of men, nor encourages them in the remotest manner to continue in sin: so far from this, it adds the ties of gratitude, to the indispensable obligations of duty, in prevailing upon us to serve God,—to love our neighbour as ourselves,—and to keep under the body, and to bring it into subjection. Whilst we set ourselves in good earnest, about so necessary a work, the Saviour, as our “sanctification,” endows us with the Holy Ghost, whereby we receive “grace sufficient for us, and strength perfected in our weakness;” and are enabled to present our bodies unto God, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is our reasonable service.

Being prepared by the principle, and habit of holiness, for seeing the Lord; the complete “redemption,” spoken of in my text, secures to Christians, a more happy and perfect state of things, than is ever enjoyed on earth; when every degree of infirmity and guilt, shall be for ever done away.

Let us, therefore my brethren, improve the gospel in the connection which has now been mentioned. Let us add our own endeavours to the grace and assistance which it affords; placing such dependence on that grace and assistance, as may render us, “stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

S E R-

S E R M O N XV.

On Self Denial.

LUKE ix. 23.

"And Jesus said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."

CHRISTIANITY, like that fiery pillar which conducted the Israelites in their journeyings from Egypt, has a dark, as well as a bright side. Our Saviour faithfully discovers both to his disciples. He at present introduces them within the shade, to excite in them an undaunted resolution, of which they should find so much need, in supporting honorably the high and distinguished character, which he called them to sustain. "And Jesus said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."

All I propose, in discoursing from these words, is, through divine assistance, to collect and explain what is said in the gospels, concerning denying ourselves, and taking up the cross, that we may follow Jesus as his disciples.

Our Saviour requires us,

First, to deny father and mother; and assures us, "he that loveth father and mother, more than me, is not worthy of me." The gospel was accidentally the occasion of great variance and division.

sion. The particular branches of the same family were often very differently affected to its interest. The one as friends and the other as enemies countenanced, or opposed it to the utmost of their power. The dispute, as generally happens, when matters of conscience are in question, was managed with much warmth. The father vigorously opposed the son, and the son the father; the mother opposed the daughter, and the daughter the mother. The ties of nature and friendship, in which they had formerly been held, only embittered the disagreement, and render it the more rancorous. Affection is certainly due to parents: their counsel and command ought undoubtedly to be received with reverence and respect. Their influence and possessions, by which we may be benefitted, added to the circumstances already mentioned, may well restrain us from the conduct, which might bring upon us, their just displeasure. But affection to a parent, and the hope of advantage from him, has sometimes interfered with affection to the Saviour, and the more glorious hope with which he animates all his followers. In such a case, we are not allowed to hesitate a moment. We must be steady in professing the faith, and uniform in fulfilling the practice, which the gospel requires, should father or mother do their utmost, to render us unsteady and wavering.

The same rule holds good, with respect to civil magistrates. They are the fathers of their country, and are entrusted with power to reward or to punish. We owe them honor and submission, as

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the ordinance of God for the good of mankind. Forgetful of their high character, they have sometimes become unrighteous and oppressive. Their subjects must blaspheme the name of Jesus, and refuse his authority, or they cannot otherwise avoid their utmost displeasure. Duty, in such circumstances, is difficult, but plain. In spite of their promises, or their threatenings; of the rewards with which they would allure, or punishments intended to affright us; of the influence of their smiles, or terror of their frowns, we must obey God rather than man, and esteem his approbation and countenance, much more than the approbation and countenance of any creature. We are,

Secondly, required to deny "wife and children." These relations are peculiarly endearing. A man forsakes his father and his mother, that he may be joined to his wife. He loves her as his own body. Nay, she is actually become one with him, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Children proceed from our own bowels. They are our joy during our happy days. They comfort and sustain the decline of life. In no other relations are we so sensible of such intimacy and endearments. But even these have no claim upon our highest affections, which are only due to the Saviour, whose will and command must on all occasions, have our first regard, even when it seems to interfere with the claims of nature and friendship.

We find Job in such circumstances as exemplify what we mean. His afflictions were heavy and numerous. Regard for God, who had put the bitter

bitter cup in his hand, disposed him to receive it with resignation. But had an earthly affection even of the highest nature, been the prevailing principle, he had certainly yielded to impatience and despair. He was persuaded, and that too by his bosom friend, to cast off the fear of God, and to put an end at once to his misery and his life. He received the counsel, although it came from her whom he loved, with the greatest indignation; and would not allow his regard for God, on any consideration, to abate in the least: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh: what! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Eli also, was in circumstances, which gave room for the exercise of the self-denial required in the text: Job came off with honor in the trial, but Eli with disgrace. The children of this aged priest were very wicked. Nothing could possibly restrain them. They disgraced equally the venerable character of their father, and the sacred office in which they were employed; Eli was bound from his relation to them, by every tie of duty, to reprove and correct them; but from his high office, as supreme judge in the Jewish commonwealth, it became him in faithfulness to his charge, to take cognizance of their crime, and to inflict upon them exemplary punishment. Instead of this, he neglects his duty in compliance with a false affection. He only chides his children, but leaves the crime unpunished. By such tenderness, he despises God, and incurred his displeasure.

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Natural affection is strong and deeply rooted. The tie, which unites together the heads of families, is equally, if not more binding. But the Christian, in the self-denial which he is required to exercise, must have these affections so well regulated, that they shall never interfere with higher duty and regard to his Saviour and his God.

Were our bosom friend, for instance, to persuade us either to disobey a known command, or to neglect a positive institution, we must, however unwilling we are to resist such persuasions in all lawful cases, deny them in this, the least weight, that we may support worthily the christian name. Were the children whom we love, to go astray, obedience to our heavenly father obliges the parent, notwithstanding his tenderness and affection, to make use of the rod, as well as seasonable reproof, to correct and reform them. When death separates the nearest friends, it brings the disposition we now illustrate, to a decisive test. Nature, in such circumstances leads us to repine and mourn; but grace teaches us to deny ourselves and to take up our cross with patience and submission.

Every attachment to the world, which in itself is inordinate, falls under our consideration in this particular, from which the disciple of Jesus must be disengaged. The pleasures of taste which the Epicure pursues; or of sense which are sought after by the voluptuous and lustful, are examples of such attachments. Of the same nature is the vain pastime, and expensive gaming, which employ the idle and the vicious. Such attachments which are in themselves

selves of a much inferior nature to those, which unite us to wife and children, interfere in so many respects with our duty as Christians, that we cannot retain them, if we would deserve so high a name.

—Whoever in compliance with the desire of his most intimate friends, deserts the profession of christianity, or acts contrary to any of its precepts; whoever, through a foolish fondness forgets the duty and authority of a parent, allowing his children to err without reproof, and to rebel without correction; whoever is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God; trampling by such conduct upon the laws of Christ, he renounces all connection with him, and cannot be enrolled among his disciples.

Our Saviour requires us,

Thirdly, for his sake to deny “brother and sister.” This relation is brought in view, as expressive of intimate familiarity and close union of any kind; and it not only includes those who are related to us by nature as brother and sister, but also, every familiar intimate and endearing friend. Almost all have their particular circle, among whom their attachments are deeply fixed. They value and improve their countenance and friendship. It gives them the most sensible distress to incur their frowns and reproach. Perhaps they may frown upon us because we obey the gospel; and reproach us for the strict attention which we pay to its institutions and commands. For Christians often have experience of “cruel mockings;” and have been “made a gazing stock both by reproaches and af-

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"fictions," and by becoming the "companions of" them who were so used." In such circumstances, we must renounce entirely the favour and countenance of those, whom we value most, since we cannot retain it with a safe conscience.

It belongs to the self-denial under consideration to forsake vain and licentious company. Our sentiments and practice, generally resemble the sentiments and practice of those among whom we associate. We would do well therefore, to be as little conversant as possible with the example, and resolutely to shut our ears against the persuasion, which tends to entice us to "rioting and drunkenness;" to "chambering and wantonness," to "strife and envying." Unless we entirely avoid evil communications, they will certainly be found to corrupt our good manners: such conduct needs resolution, and is attended with pain. It is terrible in the prospect, like plucking out a right eye, or cutting off a right hand. But the Christian must learn, that the praise of men, is of no importance, when it deprives us of the praise of God; and that their fear is a snare in which sinners are detained, when they ought to be escaping from the wrath to come, and securing themselves from the vengeance of the Almighty. Until we make such an estimate of human praise or blame, we respect our companions more than our Saviour, and become evidently unworthy of him.

We must deny.

Fourthly, houses, lands and goods, when the possession of them, is inconsistent with the duty which we owe our Saviour,

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10 The first Christians were frequently called to give up with property of every kind, in preserving a good conscience, by a steady adherence to the gospel. It was parting with that which men generally value at the highest rate. But they did it on very good grounds. For no wise man can ever estimate any earthly inheritance, as an equivalent either for the peace of his own mind, or, for the high distinction to which fidelity in the service of Jesus gives rise. We are not now obliged to make such sacrifices. In some degree however they are still necessary. No earthly possession nor pursuit on any pretence whatever, must be allowed to make such encroachments upon our thoughts and time, as cool the ardour of devout affections; or interrupt the performance of religious exercises, in a regular and becoming manner. We must, in the exercise of the disposition required in my text, moderate our attachments to all worldly objects. We must have wives as though we had them not; weep as though we wept not; rejoice as though we rejoiced not; buy as though we possessed not; use the world and not abuse it; lest being entangled thereby we make shipwreck of the faith. It is not Demas alone who has split upon this rock. It has proved fatal to many beside, who otherwise were very promising. The young man mentioned in the gospel, whose fair appearance engaged our Saviour's attention and favour, was no sooner commanded to sell his large possessions, and to give to the poor, but he became very sorrowful, and immediately deserted the Saviour's company, and separated himself from his train. . . . Some

Some have their hearts so much engaged with the things that perish, that they make use of deceit and injustice in acquiring them. Others retain them with such eagerness, that they can cherish no charitable disposition, nor allow themselves to be serviceable to the hungry or thirsty, to the naked or destitute, to the stranger or the widow. Both evidently love mammon more than Christ, and are declared to be unworthy either to bear his name, or to partake of the privileges which he has prepared for his people. We allow it to be a cross, which at a distant prospect is dreadful to men, and self-denial, which few are willing to practice, to be thus mortified to the world. But dreadful as it may appear in the prospect, and difficult as such practice may actually be found, nothing less can be dispensed with, would we become the disciples and friends of Jesus. For Christ,

Fifthly, we must deny our honor and reputation, our present comfort and present ease. The time has been when Christians have undergone this fiery trial. They have been spoken of with reproach, and treated with contempt. Their distresses have encreased, and become extreme. Their lot has in every respect been so embittered, that, if in this life only they had hope, they were of all men the most miserable. In such circumstances, the unstable were borne down by the stream, and purchased their reputation and ease by renouncing the faith; but the real disciple withstood all opposition, lest through cowardice, he should forfeit reputation and enjoyment of the highest nature.

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Cruel

Cruel mockings are hard to flesh and blood, and becoming a laughing stock, affects a virtuous mind in a sensible manner, perhaps more so than the acutest bodily distress. But the Christian is actuated by nobler principles than other men. The person whom the world celebrates as its hero, accounts it a point of honor, to chastize to the utmost of his power, the wretch who dares to affront him in the least, or in any manner vilifies his character. But the only point of honor known to the Christian, is to be punctual in the performance of his duty. He, for the joy that is set before him, like his divine Master, endures the cross, despising the shame. He does not allow himself to be weary and faint in his mind, by the contradiction of sinners; but when he is reviled, he revileth not again; when he suffers, he threatens not, but committeth himself to him who judgeth righteously. Christians, in proportion as they cherish and improve this humble and becoming disposition, resemble their great master; but destitute of it, they give up all pretensions to so great and honorable a name.

We must,

Lastly, deny life itself, rather than fail in our duty to Jesus. The present life is sweet to many who anticipate the day which shall deprive him of it with dread. Human laws take the advantage of this, to guard those who are subject to them against the commission of atrocious crimes. But these laws have sometimes given their sanction to the vices which they ought to discourage, and have

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condemned the just, who are most deserving of their protection. This was particularly the case at the commencement of christianity. Men were then put to death, because they must in conscience submit to the obedience and faith of the gospel. The choice of a wise man, in such circumstances, was easily determined. For there can be no doubt, but that we shall be much greater gainers, by cheerfully giving up a present life, when our religion requires it, in the hope of a blessed immortality, than by purchasing the continuance of a few uncertain miserable days, with the loss of every comfortable prospect for time to come. We are not now put to this trial of our faith; but the same dispositions which supported them under it with honor, are equally necessary for believers in every age. Hereby the one were reconciled to death in the service of their Saviour, and the other have their attachments to life greatly moderated, considering themselves as strangers on earth, travelling to a better country. A fondness for life, is one of the laws of our nature, which leads us to preserve it with care. This, like every present attachment, has its bound. If we restrain it within this bound, it is advantageous; if we allow it to exceed, it becomes inordinate. Life must have no attraction, when by preserving it, we forfeit the favour of God, and this we shall certainly do, unless we cheerfully resign up our lives unto him, either when his service or the ordinary course of of his providence, require them at our hand.

This disposition does not allow the Christian to
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indulge his ease, or fancy, in prejudice of the divine worship and service. The early, for instance, is the most valuable part of the day. He cannot, consistent with his character, waste it, either in sleep or in idleness. The devotions of the closet, and of the family, require his first and his most affectionate regard. Were either of them omitted, or superficially performed, even for a time, it would wound his conscience; but the continuance of such omissions or carelessness, would divest him of every pretension to the exalted character which he bears. It is equally unbecoming to aggravate the slightest indisposition, or some appearances of bad weather, as excuses constantly to withdraw from the public services of christianity, which the divine command, has strictly enjoined; when the same indisposition, and the same weather, would not withhold them from agreeable company or fashionable amusements. The text is a word of terror to such individuals. It declares you to be unworthy to bear the name, or to enjoy the privileges of Christians. If you cannot deny yourselves the little more sleep, the little more slumber, the little more folding of the hands to sleep, that God may be honored by you as individuals or as heads of families: if you cannot overlook some slight complaints, and make an effort even in indifferent weather, to frequent the house of prayer, and to make public acknowledgements of your repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not to be supposed that you would endure much hardship, far less that you would lay down your lives. in support of a cause,
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which you evidently slight and despise. The Saviour does not consider you as his servants, nor will he mention your name, when he shall appear in glory, publicly to acknowledge all his disciples, with honor and commendation.

Having now endeavoured to collect, and to explain, what is said in the gospels, concerning denying ourselves, and taking up the cross that we may follow Jesus as his disciples, we may learn, that it is no easy matter to become a Christian. It requires us to deny ourselves in the things, to which the generality of mankind are much attached. God our Saviour must have no rival in the affection of his disciples; nor must his service be neglected, were every work beside to be left undone. Father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister, must engage our affection in a lower degree, and immediately be given up. and even comparatively hated, when attachment to them, would interfere in the least with higher duty and regard. Houses and lands, present pursuit and present gain, even life itself, with reputation and ease, which give life any relish, must not receive the attention, nor be prosecuted with the earnestness, which we are bound to give the religion of Jesus, and to express in practising its precepts. Duty, in this case, from our present circumstances, is like rowing against a rapid stream, which requires strong and unremitting struggles; for whenever we discontinue our labour, we are carried down the stream, and lose all the advantages, which, through very vigorous efforts, had just been gained.

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To this, therefore, brethren, you may bring your hearts and conduct, as a certain test, whether you follow Jesus as his disciples, or turn your back upon his service.

Do you honor parents and magistrates, in such a degree, as would lead you to obey their command, were it even to interfere with the command of God? Is the friend of your bosom dearer to you, than the service of your Saviour? Do you humour your children, in neglect of that authority which enjoins parents to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" Has the praise and blame of men, more influence upon your conduct, than the praise and blame of him, who is the Judge of all the earth? Can you toil from day to day, and from year to year, for the bread which perisheth, and yet never labour in earnest for that bread, which endureth to eternal life? Are you withheld from the services of christianity, from the apprehension of inconvenience and reproach, or perhaps, lest your indulgences and ease be disturbed? Do present things engage you so much, that you seldom think of a world to come, and never prepare for it in earnest? Then, my brethren, your pretensions may be what they will; but you are condemned by the word of truth, as preferring the creature, before the Creator; a portion on earth, before a portion in Heaven; the praise and favour of men, before the praise and favour of God. We therefore testify unto you in his name, verily, verily, you shall have your reward. You shall receive all your praise,

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all your portion, all your enjoyment here below. If it be empty, if it be unsatisfying, if it be of short continuance, it is your own choice. But you are positively declared to be unworthy of the name, and privileges of Christians. You shall meet with frowns and contempt from that God, whom you now forget. You shall be driven from the presence of the Saviour, with the utmost disgrace, since you cast off his fear, and unreasonably neglect his service. These are serious considerations, and ought to determine you at all hazards, resolutely to deny yourselves, that you may follow Jesus as his disciples now, and be received among them at last to everlasting rest.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVI.

The Freedom of the Gospel call.

REVELATION, XXII. 17.

"And the Spirit and the bride say come. And let him that heareth say come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

GOD taketh pleasure in our happiness, and upbraideth us not with his gifts. He bestows them so cheerfully, that the most fearful are encouraged, and every circumstance is disposed in such a manner, that Heaven and earth seem to bid us the most hearty welcome. "And the spirit and the bride say come. And let him that heareth say come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

In discoursing from these words, I propose, through divine assistance, 1, to shew what is meant by "the water of life:" and 2, to illustrate the free and gracious manner, in which we are here invited to receive this water for our refreshment.

"The water of life" is expressive of the grace of the gospel; and particularly of the operations of the blessed spirit, whereby men become partakers of that grace.

The spirit of God renews the minds of men. He gives them a new heart and a new spirit. He causes them

them to walk in the statutes of the Lord, to keep his judgments, and to do them. He strengthens them with such might in the inner man, that they are not weary in well doing, nor faint, having the earnest of a glorious harvest, which they expect to reap in due season. The prophet describes the gospel dispensation under the same allusion of which my text makes use. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: "I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as the willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and fir-name himself by the name of Israel." In the event referred to, in this prophecy, the minds of men, particularly of the young, through the efficacious influence of the divine spirit, are so engaged with a religious character, that the attainment of it becomes their chief business and concern. Our Saviour, who, during his personal ministry, used many similies, taken from the most common and familiar objects, in unfolding the mysteries of the kingdom of God, frequently makes use of the simile in my text. Of this we have a remarkable instance, At the feast of tabernacles, the Jewish priests were accustomed to draw water out of the fountain of Siloam: to convey it with much ceremony to the temple, and there to pour it out, at the time of the evening sacrifice, before the Lord. On this solemn occasion, Jesus stood on an eminence,

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and proclaimed with a loud voice, "saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the spirit, which they that believe on him, should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." The spirit of grace, according to this assurance, exerts his influence so effectually, that believers become heavenly in their dispositions, instructive in their conversation, and God-like in their conduct; whereby men are as much benefitted, as countries are by those rivers, which, flowing through them in an uniform and uninterrupted course, moisten the soil, and render it fruitful.

The water of life is not only expressive of the grace of the gospel, and particularly of the operations of the blessed Spirit, whereby men become partakers of that grace, but also of the "fulness of joy," which the saints in Heaven experience in the "presence" of God, and the everlasting "pleasures" which they enjoy at his "right hand."

John beheld in vision, as he mentions in the beginning of this chapter, "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the lamb." It is hereby intimated, that all the springs of happiness and perfection, arise from God through the mediation of the Saviour. They flow among the inhabitants of the heavenly world, in perpetual streams from the fountain itself. The highest degree

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gree of divine influence, which believers ever enjoy on earth, greatly resembles the dropping rain and the distilling dew, "the small rain upon the tender herb, and the showers upon the grass." These natural sources of vegetation, have their appointed seasons, when they are given or withheld. They fructify the earth by their regular return, which otherwise would become a barren and an uncomfortable abode. The circumstances of saints on earth, are not unlike these seasons which succeed one another at the appointed time. Sometimes they enjoy the light of their father's countenance, at other times, clouds and darkness intervene to interrupt the enjoyment. Now, the divine Spirit awakes in them, great resolution and activity, to run the Christian race; then they languish and grow feeble. To-day, no suffering nor danger can alarm them; but to-morrow, they are timorous and daunted. Suffering has new stings, and danger an intolerable aspect. This variety in their frames, depends much upon themselves. God is the same, and would not fail of communicating increasing grace and comfort, were it not prevented on their own part, by repeated acts of folly and disobedience, of remissness and unbelief. A constant watchfulness and a steady faith, would enable them to maintain their ground, and fill them as conquerors with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But the best on earth have been overtaken with faults, and have found the divine principle on which their conduct rests, as yet imperfect. Grace, however, shall at last be triumphant,
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and every remainder of sin and folly be entirely done away; then the streams of mercy and consolation, shall flow among the just, during unknown ages, without abatement or interruption.

The influences which actuate and console saints in Heaven and on earth, are represented in my text by water, in allusion to the known qualities of that element.

Water cleanseth the body. The gospel, in like manner, delivers men from the defilement of sin. In reference to this, God hath promised, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you." The Corinthians experienced the accomplishment of this promise. The apostle, in his first epistle, informs them, "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Then he adds, "such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Water refreshes the thirsty. The gospel also hath the same tendency. It leadeth us to repentance. It converteth the soul. It assures us that our sins are blotted out; in consequence of which, "times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that

“ that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ;
“ they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they
“ shall run and not be weary ; and they shall walk,
“ and not faint.”

Water fertilizes the earth. So also he that abideth in Christ as the true vine, and Christ in him, “ the same bringeth forth much fruit :” for without Christ we “ can do nothing. Every branch in” him “ that beareth not fruit he taketh away : and every “ branch that heareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it “ may bring forth more fruit.” Hereby Christians “ adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all “ things. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that “ denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should “ live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the “ glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave himself for us, that he “ might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto “ himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”

The grace and influence of the gospel are spoken of as “ the water of life.” This is a quality peculiar to itself, It quickens the dead, and secures for them, a blessed immortality. The happiest connections which men ever form on earth, the most successful pursuits in which they engage, the fullest enjoyments which they know are found in one respect or other to be imperfect. Something disagreeable disappoints our expectations from the happiest connections. Cross turns interrupt the most successful pursuits. Bitter ingredients intermix with
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our fullest enjoyments. In opposition to what disappoints,—and crosses,—and embitters our present lot, we are made acquainted with “the water of life.” After the fullest draught of earthly comforts, we thirst again; but whoever drinketh of this water shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. We hereby receive enjoyment which hath no mixture. We engage in pursuits which are every way successful. We form connections, which yield us full and lasting satisfaction. Being at peace with God, and associated with the saints, we taste even now of streams which greatly refresh us; but we shall afterwards be sensible of pleasures which cannot now be expressed, when the Lamb himself shall feed us, and shall lead us unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

Having now shewn what is meant by the water of life, we are come, in prosecuting the method laid down, to illustrate the free and gracious manner, in which we are here invited to receive this water for our refreshment.

He “that is athirst, and whosoever will,” are particularly addressed. The invitation is general, and accommodated to the circumstances of men. You have sought satisfaction in the creatures. Disappointed in one instance, you have expected to succeed better in another. Vanity and vexation of spirit, was still found marked on all sublunary enjoyments. Having long eaten the bread of sorrow, you are at last ashamed of these pursuits
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which yield you so little profit. In the midst of your disappointment and distress, the voice of God demands your attention. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Give up with vain pursuit and vain hope. Indulge no more your vanity and folly. Despise the pleasures which are noisy and suddenly extinguished, "like the crackling of thorns under a pot." Escape from the slavery of the world, and cast off its chain. The Son will make you free indeed. He would give you the true bread which giveth life unto the world. "Why, therefore, do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

The invitation, in the text, is intended to direct men to a proper object of desire and pursuit. It also gives the most satisfying assurances to those who in this respect are already right. As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth your soul after God. Your soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: having none in Heaven but him, nor upon the earth, whom you desire besides him. You are particularly addressed, under the character of him who willeth. "Fear not, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You shall abundantly be satisfied with the fatness of his house, and he shall make you drink

drink of the river of his pleasures. The Lord shall become the portion of your inheritance and of your cup: he maintaineth your lot: he will shew you the path of life: in his presence is fullness of joy, at his right hand are pleasures for ever more.

He who "is athirst, and whosoever will," are commanded to "come," and "take of the water of life freely."

Come in the exercise of faith and prayer: come in the conscientious performance of closet and family duties: come in a strict attention to moral character and religious services. Thus approach the water of life. Receive grace sufficient for you, and strength perfected in your weakness. Improve the peace which is proclaimed on earth, and the good will so fully express to the children of men. Come and take of the water of life "*freely*." You may have no money, and no price. You may be vile and unworthy. Your guilt may equal the guilt of Sodom and Gomorrah, perhaps even of Chozazin. and Bethsaida, of Capernaum and Jerusalem. It may be aggravated in the highest degree. The salvation of God, notwithstanding, is prepared before your eyes; and he upbraideth you not with his gifts. The streams of mercy and grace are flowing to quench your thirst; and you are invited to taste and to live for ever. You cannot, certainly be safe, in refusing what is before you, when it flows in a full stream for your particular advantage.

For your further encouragement, "the spirit" and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come."

"The spirit," who animates the ministers of Christ, points out by them to men the water of life; and encourages them to receive it, that they may be strengthened for the service of God. They have particular instructions, to testify unto their respective charges, that this is a pressing and an indispensable duty. "The bride," or church, to whom the Lamb is espoused repeats the invitation, and supports it with the sweetest experience. "I have drunk of this heavenly stream, and be persuaded from what I know, that you forsake your own mercy, in refusing it; and shall receive no real satisfaction, from the lying vanities which you observe, unless you taste and see that God is gracious." Whoever heareth, is required to "say come." The invitation must echo through the different ages of the world, and every corner of the earth. It must be announced by angels, and received by men. It must pass from the old to the young, from the high to the low, from the learned to the unlearned. All are required to urge one another by example, by precept, and by their whole influence, to the performance of so necessary a duty. The guilty must know, that others as vile as they, washing their robes, and making them white in the blood of the Lamb, have attained the highest perfection, that they also imitating their conduct, may partake of their happiness.

The passage, which has now been explained, represents God in a very amiable light. He dispenses, among men, the most gracious influences. These flow in a full stream. He has at heart our

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improvement

improvement of this our mercy. He makes it an indispensable duty. We are invited to the performance of it by the blessed spirit. The invitation is enforced by the experience of his church. It is announced in Heaven and received on earth. God, hereby discovers himself as much interested in our salvation, as if our goodness could reach to him. Jesus Christ who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. The holy spirit through his communications is ready to make us wise unto salvation. On your part you are required to come and take God to be your God ;---Christ to be your Saviour ;---and the Holy Spirit to be your sanctifier. Draw near to God in prayer ; draw near also in all the ordinances of the gospel, and particularly in the ordinance of the Lord's supper. In these approaches " believe that " he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Derive high encouragement from a steady faith in your " great high priest, that " is passed into the Heavens, Jesus the son of God." yield yourselves to the motions and influences of the blessed spirit, that " by a patient continuance in " well doing," you may obtain " eternal life." Comfort and satisfaction attend such conduct. It is your reasonable service. Has God loved you so much, and shall you express no gratitude or esteem? shall Christ have died for your sins, and the remembrance ever be erased from your hearts? shall the Holy Ghost who refreshes and comforts you, be grieved by filthy conversation and guilty conduct? It is not possible. Your hearts swell with indignation.

indignation at the thought. You must devote yourselves to the service of so gracious a God. You must remember the death of your Saviour. You must cherish all the motions of the Holy Spirit. Hereby you drink of these streams, which are soon to empty themselves into that boundless ocean of pleasures, where you shall be refreshed and satisfied for ever.

The heart must be hard indeed that withstands such condescension and grace. Nay, it argues the greatest degree of folly and madness. For the anger of a provoked friend is more intolerable than the anger of an enemy. The friendship of God, in particular, is the source of perfect happiness; but his wrath abiding upon the soul, fills it with tribulation and anguish. Yet, you inconsiderately forfeit the one, and expose yourselves to the other. You give your hearts to the world. You drink of its embittered streams, and vainly expect satisfaction. You put off the evil day, and think not of a future judgment. You say with the scoffers of old, "where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." Where, O sinner, shall you then find your portion? Or where the objects of pursuit which now engage your hearts? Alas! they

are lost, they are perished in the ashes of a consumed world. No object shall then remain to attract your attention, but an object of terror. You shall see the Son of man descending from Heaven; that same Jesus whose grace you now despise, "revealed with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on" you "that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." The terrors, therefore, of the Lord, as well as the grace of the gospel, enforce the command in the text; come and take of the water of life freely; that you may never thirst, but have that water in you, a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

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